

## CHAPTER VII

### THE THEORY OF SYMBOLISM<sup>1</sup>

Introduction—True Symbolism—Genesis of Symbolism—Functional Symbolism—Conclusions

#### I. INTRODUCTION.

My attention was primarily directed to this subject, to the desirability of attaining a fuller understanding of the theoretical nature of symbolism, through observing that it is the interpreting of symbols which calls forth the greatest 'resistance' in psycho-analytic work, and, further, that this is also the centre of the strongest opposition to psycho-analysis in general. This fact—it may be called such, for the observation itself can very easily be checked—is really more curious than it might appear, since the meaning of the symbols in question is the part of psycho-analysis that is most independent of individual psycho-analysts; it is a matter that, so to speak, stands outside psycho-analysis, being a body of knowledge that is familiar ground in many other branches of science—*e.g.*, anthropology, folk-lore, philology, and so on. An explanation of the fact itself will be attempted below.

As soon as one begins to go into the subject deeply, however, its interest and importance rapidly widen, more and more problems open out, and at last, especially if the word 'symbolism' is taken in its widest sense, the subject is seen to comprise almost the whole development of civilisation. For what is this other than a never-ending series of evolutionary substitutions, a ceaseless replacement of one idea, interest, capacity, or tendency by another? The progress of the human mind, when considered genetically, is seen to consist, not—as is commonly thought—merely of a number of

<sup>1</sup> Amplified from a paper read before the British Psychological Society, January 29, 1916. Published in the *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. ix.

accretions added from without, but of the following two processes: on the one hand the extension or transference of interest and understanding from earlier, simpler, and more primitive ideas, etc., to more difficult and complex ones, which in a certain sense are a continuation of and symbolise the former; and on the other hand the constant unmasking of previous symbolisms, the recognition that these, though previously thought to be literally true, were really only aspects or representations of the truth, the only ones of which our minds were, for either affective or intellectual reasons, at the time capable. One has only to reflect on the development of religion or science, for example, to perceive the accuracy of this description.

It is evidently necessary, therefore, that we try to understand more of the nature of symbolism, and of the way in which it operates. Our effort is met at the outset by this difficulty. The term 'symbolism' has been used to denote very many different things, some of them quite unconnected with one another, and all of them in need of differentiation. Those interested in the various uses of the word may be referred to the historical work of Schlesinger,<sup>1</sup> who has collected some hundreds of different meanings and definitions. Etymology is no guide here, for the earliest meaning of the Greek *σύμβολον* does not seem to be the present-day one of a sign, but a bringing or weaving together, an implication which can perhaps be traced in the fact that most symbols have many significations; the root of the word, Sanscrit *gal*, Indogermanic *bal*, referred especially to the flowing together of water.

The word 'symbolism' is currently used both in a wide sense, roughly equivalent to sign, and in a strict sense, as in psycho-analysis, which will be defined later. To give an idea of what different phenomena are included in the former category, we may enumerate the following examples. It is applied in the first place to the idea of various objects, such as emblems, amulets, devices, tokens, marks, badges, talismans, trophies, charms, phylacteries. Then it is used to indicate various figures of speech and modes of thought, such as the simile, metaphor, apologue, metonymy, synecdoche, allegory, parable, all of which are, of course, differentiated by philologists. Mythological, artistic, magical, religious, and mystical fields of thought, as well as that of primitive metaphysics and science, are often called symbolic. There is a

<sup>1</sup> Schlesinger, 'Geschichte des Symbols,' 1912.

symbolism of cubism, of the Catholic Church, of freemasonry, a colour symbolism, and even a symbolic logic. The word is further used to denote various signs, passwords, and customs. Bowing, for instance, is said to symbolise the ancient custom of prostration, and hence respect with an absence of hostile intent. Fifty years ago to wear a red shirt or blouse would have been said to symbolise the fact that the wearer sympathised with Garibaldi. The Venetian ceremony in which the Doge wedded the Adriatic with a ring symbolised the naval power of Venice. In Frankish law the seller of a plot of ground handed the buyer a single stone from it as a symbol of the transaction, and in ancient Bavarian law a twig was similarly used in the sale of a forest. When Louis XI. dispossessed his brother of Normandy, he solemnly broke the ducal ring at an assembly held expressly for the purpose in Rouen in 1469; the act symbolised the complete destruction of his brother's authority. Similar examples of the use of the word could be multiplied endlessly.

Now, amid this maze of meanings what attributes in common can be found between the various ideas and acts denoted by the word 'symbol' or 'symbolic'? I think I shall find general agreement that the following ones are, if not absolutely essential, at least very characteristic, and from them we may advance to a more precise definition of the problem.

1. A symbol is a representative or substitute of some other idea, from which in the context it derives a secondary significance not inherent in itself. It is important to note that the flow of significance is from the primary idea to the secondary, to the symbol, so that typically a more essential idea is symbolised by a less essential. Thus all sorts of important things may be represented by a shred of material called a flag.

2. It represents the primary element through having something in common with it. Thus it would be a stretch of language to call a mnemonic knot in a handkerchief a symbol of the idea that has to be remembered, although some writers do so.<sup>1</sup> The association may be an internal or an external one. An association, however, which is superficial to the reason may often be of significance in feeling, especially in the unconscious.

3. A symbol is characteristically sensorial and concrete, whereas the idea represented may be a relatively<sup>2</sup> abstract and complex one. The symbol thus tends to be shorter and more

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, Ferrero, 'Les lois psychologiques de symbolisme,' 1895, pp. 25 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> In true symbolism the idea is general rather than abstract.

condensed than the idea represented. The explanation of bowing, given above, well illustrates this.

4. Symbolic modes of thought are the more primitive, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically, and represent a reversion to some simpler and earlier stage of mental development. They are therefore more often met with in conditions that favour such a reversion; for example, fatigue, drowsiness, bodily illness, neurosis and insanity, and, above all, in dreams, where conscious mental life is reduced almost to a minimum. A simple observation in this connection is that a tired man usually prefers looking at an illustrated paper, where ideas are presented on a sensorial plane, to reading.

5. In most uses of the word a symbol is a manifest expression for an idea that is more or less hidden, secret, or kept in reserve. Most typically of all the person employing the symbol is not even conscious of what it actually represents.

6. Symbols resemble wit in being made spontaneously, automatically, and, in the broad sense of the word, unconsciously.<sup>1</sup> The stricter the sense in which the term 'symbolism' is used, the truer is this statement.

In accord with the two attributes last mentioned is the attitude of the conscious mind towards the interpretation of the symbol, in regard to both comprehension and feeling. Namely, the wider and more diluted the sense in which the word 'symbol' is used, the more easily is its meaning perceived and the more readily is the interpretation accepted. With a symbol in the strict sense, on the contrary, the individual has no notion of its meaning, and rejects, often with repugnance, the interpretation.

By the enumeration of these six attributes we have narrowed and defined the field somewhat, but they still apply to a considerable number of different mental processes—in fact, to most forms of indirect figurative representation. *The thesis will here be maintained that true symbolism, in the strict sense, is to be distinguished from other forms of indirect representation, and that not merely as a matter of convenience, because it is different from the rest, but because the clear conception thus gained of the nature of the differences must prove of value in understanding the most primitive levels in mental development and their relation to conscious thought. Before doing so, and before seeking to define the distinguishing characteristics*

<sup>1</sup> See Ferrero, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

of true symbolism, it will be profitable briefly to examine a purely linguistic question—namely, the metaphorical use of words;<sup>1</sup> for it is certain that the metaphor is one of the processes—and the most familiar one—that have to be distinguished from symbolism.

The simile is the simplest figure of speech; it logically antedates even the metaphor, and certainly the adjective. In some primitive languages—*e.g.*, Tasmanian—there are no adjectives, similes being used in their stead, the reason, no doubt, being that it is easier to observe a concrete object which can be used in comparison than to abstract the notion of an attribute. The metaphor differs from a simile in the suppression of one of the terms of comparison; we say, for example, 'he buffeted the blows of Fortune,' instead of 'he strove against his ill fortune as he would have buffeted away blows.' A metaphor, therefore, presupposes a simile, which is the more primitive figure; in it the words 'as' or 'like' are suppressed, though always implied. In a simile a resemblance is pointed out between things that in other respects are different—*e.g.*, 'lies, like crows, come home to roost'; a mere parallel does not constitute a simile. Our motive in employing a simile is to add ornament, force, or vividness to the phrase, but it is to be supposed that the original motive, as in Tasmania, was to indicate the presence of an attribute by the simple process of comparison. The dream makes frequent use of this latter device, which is, in fact, its usual way of indicating an attribute; often quite a complicated description of a person can be conveyed by identifying—*i.e.*, comparing—him with some one else. This dream mechanism of identification has points of contact with the metaphor also. Thus, if a person's conduct or appearance resembles in some way that of a lion or bull, he may masquerade in a dream in the form of the animal, just as in speech we use such expressions as 'he was a lion in the fight.'

In the evolution, or what philologists call the decay, of the metaphor there are three stages, which are, of course, not sharply marked off from one another. In the first of these a word that is most often used in its literal sense is occasionally used in a figurative one, where its metaphorical nature is at once obvious; an example would be 'the wrath of the gale.'

<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. B. Maye, art. on 'Enlargement of Vocabulary' in O'Neill's 'Guide to the English Language,' 1915.

In the second stage both the literal and figurative senses are familiar, so that when the word is used in the latter sense we are conscious of its metaphorical nature only slightly or on reflection—preconsciously, as psycho-analysts would say; thus we speak of 'the depth of the sea' literally, and 'the depth of despair' figuratively. In the third stage the figurative sense has become the usual, literal one, and through either ignorance or forgetfulness we are no longer aware of its original literal meaning; thus the word 'melancholy' does not make us think of black bile, nor does the expression 'acuity of mind' make us think of a cutting edge. Here the decay of the metaphor is complete, and the figurative 'symbol' has acquired an objective reality of its own in place of the subjective one of the earlier stages.

The nature of metaphor will be discussed below in connection with the distinction between it and true symbolism. But consideration of the evolution of the metaphor, as just indicated, already teaches us, amongst other things, that the simile is the primary process, there being sufficient likeness between two ideas for them to be treated as at least in some respect equivalent. We note, further, the gradual transference of significance from one use of a word to another, ending in the independence of the original metaphor, which has acquired a reality of its own. This process is no doubt parallel to the gradual extension and evolution of the ideas themselves that are denoted by the words. To show how extraordinarily the uses of a word can ramify from its original simple one, just as other mental processes (interests, ideas, etc.) ramify and extend from a primary one, the example may be taken of the current uses only of the word 'head.' The following are only a few of its numerous applications: the head of the army; the head of a class; the head of a pin; the head of a coin; the head of the table (*i.e.*, the person sitting at its chief end); the heads or headings of an article; the many idiomatic phrases such as 'to give a horse its head,' etc. It would take a volume to expound the ramifications of any of the primary roots of a language.

About the motives for metaphor-making more will be said presently, but a few remarks may be made at this point. A prominent motive seems to be to heighten appreciation on the hearer's part by calling to his mind another image more easily apprehended or comprehended, usually one more

familiar in respect of the attribute implied (though by no means necessarily in other respects); or, to present the obverse of the same idea, a metaphor serves to eke out the relative paucity of attributive description. In this sentence the stress falls on the word 'easily'; a metaphor makes the idea, and especially the accompanying affect, more credible, plastic, and *easy*. It overcomes a (relative) difficulty in apprehension or, as the case may be, in presentation; this difficulty may be of either intellectual or affective origin.

## II. TRUE SYMBOLISM.

The subject of metaphors will be left for the moment in this stage, and that of true symbolism entered on. What I shall here propose to call true symbolism is one variety of the group of indirect representation to which six attributes were attached above. It therefore possesses these attributes together with a number of others that distinguish it from the rest of the group. Before defining these and discussing them in detail, I wish to prepare the reader's mind by remarking that an important characteristic of true symbolism is that the interpretation of the symbol usually evokes a reaction of surprise, incredulity, and repugnance on the part of those unfamiliar with it. An example that well illustrates these features is the interpretation of the familiar Punchinello of the marionette stage as a phallic symbol, on which something may be added by way of exposition.

The conception of the male organ as a 'little man' is extremely widespread, and, by the process known to mythologists as 'decomposition,'<sup>1</sup> it often becomes personified and incorporated in an independent figure. A large number of the dwarfs, gnomes, and goblins so common in folk-lore and legend are of this nature,<sup>2</sup> their characteristic attributes being that they are deformed, ugly caricatures of men, wicked and even malign—yet sometimes willing to be friendly and to yield services on certain conditions, able to perform wonderful and magical feats, and winning their own way in spite of their obvious disadvantages. Sand's description of Punchinello is in these respects typical:<sup>3</sup> 'Il a le cœur aussi sec que son bâton,

<sup>1</sup> See Ernest Jones, *American Journal of Psychology*, vol. xxi., pp. 105, 106.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Freud's analysis of Rumpelstilzchen, *Internat. Zeitschr. f. ärztl. Psychoanalyse*, Jahrg. i., S. 148.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Sand, 'Masques et Bouffons,' 1860, vol. i., p. 124.

c'est un égoïste dans toute l'acception du mot. Sous une apparente belle humeur, c'est un être féroce; il fait le mal pour le plaisir de le faire. Se souciant de la vie d'un homme comme de celle d'une puce, il aime et cherche des querelles. . . . Il ne craint ni Dieu ni diable, lui qui a vu passer, sous son nez crochu et verruqueux, tant de sociétés et de religions . . . (speaking of his passion for women) malgré ses bosses et sa figure peu faite pour séduire, il est si caustique, si persuasif, si entreprenant et si insolent, qu'il a des succès.' Nodier<sup>1</sup> fittingly apostrophises him, 'O Polichinelle, simulacre animé de l'homme naturel abandonné à ses instincts.' His physical characteristics well accord with this interpretation: the long hooked nose, long chin, projecting hump on his back, prominent stomach, and pointed cap.

Punchinello seems first to have made his appearance in England with the Restoration,<sup>2</sup> but his history and that of similar figures is a world-wide one.<sup>3</sup> In England he quickly became assimilated with, and took some of his features from, the English clown and Jack Pudding, just as in Germany he fused with the Hanswurst. In Eastern countries he is met with as Karagheus. The prototype of all modern polichinellos is the Neapolitan *polecenella*, who cannot be traced farther back than the Renaissance. It is highly probable, however, that he is a lineal descendant of the Maccus of the Roman atellanes (introduced in the sixth century), for the statue of Maccus in the Capponi Museum at Rome (found in 1727, but dating from Roman times) shews the closest resemblance to the modern figure.

The attribute of comicality attaching to such figures is of considerable interest in more than one direction. The idea of the male organ as a comic mannikin, a 'funny little man,' is a very common one, and is much more natural to women than to men. The source and meaning of this alone constitutes a problem which cannot be dealt with here, since it would lead us too far away into the nature of the comic in general.<sup>4</sup> The idea itself is a subsection of phallic symbolism, concerning which the reader may be reminded of the following points:

<sup>1</sup> Nodier, quoted by Sand, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that in the first recorded mention of him in England (Accounts of the Overseers of St. Martin's, 1666) the showman's name is given as Punchinello, an example of the identification of man with puppet.

<sup>3</sup> Many points have been elucidated since Payne Collier's (anonymous) 'History of Punch and Judy,' 1828, the fullest work on the subject.

<sup>4</sup> See Freud, 'Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten,' 1905, Kap. vii.



There are two broad classes of such symbols, the patriarchal symbols of the eagle, bull, etc., representing the father's power and rights, and the matriarchal symbols representing the revolutionary son. The latter are again divided into two sub-groups, those, such as the devil, the cock, the serpent, etc., which are tabooed and interdicted, and those, such as the goat, the ape, and the ass<sup>1</sup> (the animal sacred to the worship of Priapus, with which the figure of Punchinello is constantly brought into association), which are contemned as ridiculous and comic.

I might add that there is a slight trace of the original revolutionary meaning of the matriarchal phallic symbol left in the pose of such comic figures—the most striking example of which was the mediæval court jester—as critics who lash the conventions of society. There is a hint of this point in one of Bernard Shaw's prefaces;<sup>2</sup> it runs: 'Every despot must have one disloyal subject to keep him sane. . . . Democracy has now handed the sceptre of the despot to the sovereign people; but they, too, must have their confessor, whom they call Critic. Criticism is not only medicinally salutary: it has positive popular attractions in its cruelty, its gladiatorship, and the gratification given to envy by its attacks on the great, and to enthusiasm by its praises. It may say things which many would like to say, but dare not. . . . Its iconoclasms, seditions, and blasphemies, if well turned, tickle those whom they shock; so that the Critic adds the privileges of the court jester to those of the confessor. Garrick, had he called Dr. Johnson Punch, would have spoken profoundly and wittily; whereas Dr. Johnson, in hurling that epithet at him, was but picking up the cheapest sneer an actor is subject to.'

We have next to consider the respects in which this example differs from those given earlier in the paper, and it will be well first to examine the definitions offered by other writers. The most exact of these is that given by Rank and Sachs,<sup>3</sup> which I will quote in full: 'Ein letztes, wegen seiner besonderen Eignung zur Verhüllung des Unbewussten und zu seiner Anpassung (Kompromissbildung) an neue Bewusstseinsinhalte überall mit Vorliebe verwendetes Ausdrucksmittel des Verdrängten ist das *Symbol*. Wir verstehen darunter eine besondere Art der indirekten Darstellung, die durch gewisse Eigen-

<sup>1</sup> See Storfer, 'Marias Jungfräuliche Mutterschaft,' 1914.

<sup>2</sup> G. B. Shaw, 'Plays Unpleasant,' 1898, p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> Rank and Sachs, 'Die Bedeutung der Psychoanalyse für die Geisteswissenschaften,' 1913, S. 11.

tümlichkeiten von den ihm nahestehenden des Gleichnisses, der Metapher, der Allegorie, der Anspielung und anderen Formen der bildlichen Darstellung von Gedankenmaterial (nach Art des Rebus) ausgezeichnet ist. Das Symbol stellt gewissermaßen eine ideale Vereinigung all dieser Ausdrucksmittel dar: es ist ein stellvertretender anschaulicher Ersatzausdruck für etwas Verborgenes, mit dem es sinnfällige Merkmale gemeinsam hat oder durch innere Zusammenhänge assoziativ verbunden ist. Sein Wesen liegt in der Zwei- oder Mehrdeutigkeit, wie es ja selbst auch durch eine Art Verdichtung, ein Zusammenwerfen (*συμβάλλειν*) einzelner charakteristischer Elemente entstanden ist. Seine Tendenz vom Begrifflichen nach dem Anschaulichen stellt es in die Nähe des primitiven Denkens, und als solches gehört die Symbolisierung wesentlich dem Unbewussten an, entbehrt aber als Kompromissleistung keineswegs der bewussten Determinanten, die in verschieden starkem Anteil die Symbolbildung und das Symbolverständnis bedingen.' [ 'A final means of expression of repressed material, one which lends itself to very general use on account of its especial suitability for disguising the unconscious and adapting it (by compromise formations) to new contents of consciousness, is the Symbol. By this term we understand a special kind of indirect representation which is distinguished by certain peculiarities from the simile, metaphor, allegory, allusion, and other forms of pictorial presentation of thought material (after the manner of a rebus), to all of which it is related. The symbol represents an almost ideal union of all these means of expression: it is a substitutive, perceptual replacement-expression for something hidden, with which it has evident characteristics in common or is coupled by internal associative connections. Its essence lies in its having two or more meanings, as, indeed, it itself originated in a kind of condensation, an amalgamation of individual characteristic elements. Its tendency from the conceptual to the perceptual indicates its nearness to primitive thought; by this relationship symbolisation essentially belongs to the unconscious, but, in its function as a compromise, it in no way lacks conscious determining factors, which in varying degrees condition both the formation of symbols and the understanding for them.' ]

They then specify the characteristics of true symbols as follows:<sup>1</sup> 'Die Stellvertretung für Unbewusstes, die konstante

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, S. 18.

Bedeutung, die Unabhängigkeit von individuellen Bedingungen, die entwicklungsgeschichtliche Grundlage, die sprachlichen Beziehungen, die phylogenetischen Parallelen (in Mythos, Kult, Religion, etc.) ['Representation of unconscious material, constant meaning, independence of individual conditioning factors, evolutionary basis, linguistic connections, phylogenetic parallels in myths, cults, religion, etc.']. These attributes will next be examined and commented on in order.

1. *Representation of Unconscious Material*.—This is perhaps the characteristic that most sharply distinguishes true symbolism from the other processes to which the name is often applied. By it is meant, not so much that the concepts symbolised are not known to the individual, for most often they are, as that the affect investing the concept is in a state of repression, and so is unconscious. Further, the process of symbolisation is carried out unconsciously, and the individual is quite unaware of the meaning of the symbol he has employed; indeed, is often unaware of the fact that he has employed one at all, since he takes the symbol for reality. The actual comparison between the idea symbolised and the symbol has never been present to consciousness at all, or else has only been present for a time and then forgotten. In many cases this point of comparison is evident as soon as one's attention is directed to the fact of comparison. In other cases considerable reflection is needed to discover it, and in some cases it is not yet patent—that is to say, any possible points of comparison between the two ideas seem too tenuous to justify the symbolism, even when the fact of the latter is undoubted.

2. *Constant Meaning*.—The statement here implied needs some modification. A given symbol may have two or occasionally even more meanings; for instance, in dreams a room may symbolise either a woman or a womb. In that case the interpretation will depend on the context, the associations, and other material available. A preference for one of these meanings can sometimes be correlated with the social class, the mental circle, or the race to which the individual using the symbol belongs, or it may depend on purely individual constellations. But the possible variation in meaning is exceedingly restricted, and the striking feature is its constancy in different fields of symbolism, dreams, myths, etc., and in different kinds of people. It has further to be remembered that in interpretation it is usually a question, not of either this

meaning or that, but of both. In unconscious condensation, as shewn, for instance, in dreams, there are several layers, in each of which one of the meanings is the true one. When these points are appreciated it will be seen that there is little scope for arbitrariness in the interpretation of symbols.

3. *Independence of Individual Conditioning Factors.*—I find that this attribute is not unambiguously expressed in the words chosen, or else it is a question of the shades of meaning not being identical in the corresponding English and German words. 'Independence of' should be rather 'Non-dependence on,' the point being that the symbolism is not conditioned by individual factors only. The individual has not an unlimited range of choice in the creation of a given symbol, but on the contrary a very restricted one, more important determining factors being those that are common to large classes of men or, more often, to mankind as a whole. The part played by individual factors is a much more modest one. While the individual cannot choose what idea shall be represented by a given symbol (for the reason just mentioned), he can choose what symbol out of the many possible ones shall be used to represent a given idea; more than this, he can sometimes, for individual reasons, represent a given idea by a symbol that no one else has used as a symbol.<sup>1</sup> What he cannot do is to give a regular symbol a different meaning from any one else; he can merely choose his symbols or make new ones, and even in the latter case they have the same meaning as they would with other people who might use them.

This curious independence of symbolic meanings raises in another form the old question of the inheritance of ideas. Some writers—*e.g.*, Jung—hold that anthropological symbolism is inherited as such, and explain in this way its stereotyped nature. For reasons I have developed elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> I adhere to the contrary view that symbolism has to be re-created afresh out of individual material, and that the stereotypy is due to the uniformity of the human mind in regard to the particular tendencies that furnish the source of symbolism—*i.e.*, to the uniformity of the fundamental and perennial interests of mankind. If this view is true, then further study of the subject must yield important conclusions as to the nature of the latter.

<sup>1</sup> See Freud, 'Die Traumdeutung,' 4<sup>e</sup> Aufl., 1914, S. 261.

<sup>2</sup> *Imago*, Jahrg. i., 1912, S. 486, 487.

4. *Evolutionary Basis*.—This genetic aspect of symbolism will be dealt with at length later on in the paper.

5. *Linguistic Connections*.—We have seen that in symbolism the unconscious notices and makes use of comparisons between two ideas which it would not occur to our conscious mind to bring together. Now, the study of etymology, and especially of semantics, reveals the interesting fact that, although the word denoting the symbol may have no connotation of the idea symbolised, yet its history always shews some connection with the latter. This connection may be one of different kinds. Thus it may appear in one sphere of thought—*e.g.*, wit—when it is not present in the ordinary use of the word; for example, the well-known ‘officers’ remounts’ joke current during the South African War illustrates the unconscious association between the ideas of riding and of coitus, although this association is very far from being present in most spheres of thought. It may appear in an older and now obsolete use of the same word, in the root from which the word was derived, or from other words cognate with it.

This may be illustrated from the example of symbolism depicted above. The name Punchinello is an English contamination (see below) derived from the Neapolitan *pol(l)ecenella* (modern Italian *pulcinella*), which is the diminutive of *pollecena*, the young of the turkey-cock (the modern Italian *pulcino* means pullet, *pulcinello* being its diminutive); the turkey-cock itself is a recognised phallic symbol, as, indeed, is the domestic cock, both ideationally and linguistically. The Latin root is *pullus*, which means the young of any animal; the phallus is often, for obvious reasons, identified with the idea of a male child, a little boy or little man. The reason why the name came to be used in this connection is thought to be the resemblance between the nose of the actor and the hooked bill of the bird, and again it may be pointed out that both nose and beak are common phallic symbols.

The name *polecenella*, or its English variant ‘polichinello’ (derived *via* the French *polichinelle*), was contaminated with the English word ‘punch,’ the main meaning of which is a tool for perforating material, with or without the impressing of a design—*e.g.*, to pierce metal or to stamp a die; it used to mean a dagger (another common symbol). The word is short for ‘puncheon,’ which used to mean a bodkin or dagger, and is now used in carpentry to denote ‘a short upright piece of

timber which serves to stiffen one or more long timbers or to support a load'; it comes from the late Latin *punctiare*, to prick or punch. Pepys, in his 'Diary,' April 30, 1669, calls punch 'a word of common use for all that is thick and short,' and refers to a gun (by the way, yet another phallic symbol), 'which, from its shortness and bigness, they do call Punchinello.' Suffolk punches are thick-set draught horses with short legs. To sum up, the four ideas that keep recurring in connection with the name 'punchinello' are (1) a caressing name for male offspring, equivalent to 'little man,' (2) a projecting part of the body, (3) the notion of piercing or penetrating, and (4) that of shortness and stoutness—four ideas that admirably serve to describe the male organ and nothing else; indeed, there is no other object to which the curious combination applies of stoutness and pricking. Finally, I may add that two common expressions become more intelligible in the light of the interpretation just given. 'To be as proud (or pleased) as Punch': overweening pride is intimately associated in the unconscious with exhibitionistic self-adoration. 'He has plenty of punch in him': in this modern Americanism the word 'punch' is used as a synonym for the colloquial 'backbone,' 'spunk,' 'sand,' etc.—*i.e.*, symbols of the male organ and its product.

In connection with the phallic signification of the staff wielded by Punchinello, one may remark that the word itself is cognate with the M.H.G. *staben*, to become stiff, both probably coming from a pre-Teutonic root *sta*, which means to stand up. A more familiar piece of knowledge is that the word 'yard,' used as a measure of length, had three centuries ago two other current meanings—(1) a staff, and (2) the phallus; it is still used in the latter sense by sailors.<sup>1</sup> It is an equivalent of the jester's bauble. In addition to the long nose and staff already mentioned, Punchinello displays several other phallic attributes, the dog Toby being one of them. The fact that such a symbol can in its turn have similar symbols attached to it, a fact strikingly illustrated in the phallic ornaments worn as amulets by Roman ladies,<sup>2</sup> confirms the view taken above of the identification of man with phallus, of the whole with the part.

Even with symbol words where it is hard to trace any association between them and the words denoting the ideas symbolised, such an association is often apparent in the case of synonyms or foreign equivalents. A good example is our

<sup>1</sup> The Persian word *khutka* also means both 'club' and 'penis.'

<sup>2</sup> See Vorberg, 'Museum eroticum Neapolitanum,' Sect. 'Bronzen.'

word 'room'—a room is a regular unconscious symbol for woman—where one has to go to very remote Aryan sources—*e.g.*, Old Irish—to find any trace of a feminine connotation; one has only to turn, however, to the German equivalent, *Zimmer*, to find that the compound *Frauenzimmer* is a common colloquialism for woman.

6. *Phylogenetic Parallels*.—One of the most amazing features of true symbolism is the remarkable ubiquity of the same symbols, which are to be found, not only in different fields of thought, dreams, wit, insanity, poetry, etc., among a given class and at a given level of civilisation, but among different races and at different epochs of the world's history. A symbol which to-day we find, for instance, in an obscene joke is also to be found in a mythical cult of Ancient Greece, and another that we come across only in dream analysis was used thousands of years ago in the sacred books of the East. The following examples may be quoted in illustration of this correspondence. The idea of teeth, in dreams, is often symbolically related to that of child-birth, a connection that is never to be found in consciousness; in the Song of Songs we read: 'Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep, which go up from the washing, whereof everyone beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.' The idea of a snake, which is never consciously associated with that of the phallus, is regularly so in dreams, being one of the most constant and invariable symbols: in primitive religions the two ideas are quite obviously interchangeable, so that it is often hard to distinguish phallic from ophitic worship; many traces of this are to be found even in the Old Testament. The idea of father or mother is constantly symbolised in dreams by that of king or queen respectively. The word 'king' is ultimately derived from the Sanscrit root *gan*, meaning to beget; *ganaka* was the Sanscrit for father, and occurs also in the Vedas as the name of a well-known king. The word 'queen' comes from the Sanscrit *gani*, which means simply mother. The Czar of Russia is, or rather was until recently, called the 'Little Father,' the same title as the Hunnish Attila (diminutive of Atta=father). The title 'Landesvater' is commonly used in Germany, just as the Americans still call Washington the 'Father of his Country.' The ruler of the Catholic Church is called the 'Holy Father,' or by his Latin name of 'Papa.'

By adding the six attributes just discussed to the more general six mentioned earlier, we have formulated a conception

of symbolism as distinct from the other kinds of indirect representation. The precise differences and relations between them will be discussed more fully below, and we may conclude this section by a brief consideration of the actual content of symbolism.

The number of symbols met with in practice is extraordinarily high, and can certainly be counted by thousands.<sup>1</sup> In astonishing contrast with this stands the curious fact that the number of ideas thus symbolised is very limited indeed, so that in the interpretation of them the complaint of monotony is naturally often heard. The fact of this remarkable disproportion between the number of symbols and that of symbolised ideas in itself raises many interesting problems, on which,

<sup>1</sup> There is no satisfactory comprehensive work on the content of symbolism. The most reliable collection, unfortunately much too unfinished for what is needed, is that given in Freud's 'Traumdeutung' (4<sup>e</sup> Aufl., S. 262-274), amplified in his 'Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse' (Zweiter Teil, 1916, S. 164-180). The numerous examples scattered through Otto Rank's works can also be depended on. In Stekel's 'Sprache des Traumes' and his 'Angstzustände' there is an extensive material, useful to those capable of criticising it. On the anthropological side one may mention the well-known works by Bachofen, 'Versuch über die Gräbersymbolik der Alten,' 1859; Burton, 'Terminal Essay of the Arabian Nights,' 1890; Cox, 'Mythology of the Aryan Nations,' 1870; Dieterich, 'Mutter Erde,' 2<sup>e</sup> Aufl., 1913; Dulaure, 'Des divinités génératrices,' 1805 (much enlarged in a German edition by Krauss and Reiskel, 'Die Zeugung in Glauben, Sitten und Bräuchen der Völker,' 1909); Faber, 'Origin of Pagan Idolatry,' 1816; Fanin, 'Secret Museum of Naples,' English Translation, 1872; Fergusson, 'Tree and Serpent Worship,' 1873; Forlong, 'The Rivers of Life,' 1883; Higgins, 'Anacalypsis,' 1833-1836; Inman, 'Ancient Faiths embodied in Ancient Names,' 1868, and 'Ancient Pagan and Modern Christian Symbolism' (the most useful book on the subject), 1869, Second Edition 1874; Hargrave Jennings, 'The Rosicrucians,' 1887; King, 'The Gnostics and their Remains,' 1864; Payne Knight, 'A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus,' 1786, New Edition 1871, and 'The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology,' 1818, New Edition 1876; Moor, 'Hindu Pantheon,' 1810; Staniland Wake, 'The Influence of the Phallic Idea in the Religions of Antiquity,' *Journ. of Anthropology*, 1870, Nos. 1 and 2, and 'Serpent Worship,' 1888; Wake and Westropp, 'Ancient Symbol Worship,' Second Edition 1875; Westropp, 'Primitive Symbolism,' 1885; together with the less known works by Campbell, 'Phallic Worship,' 1887; Freimark, 'Okkultismus und Sexualität'; Hermann, 'Xenologie des Saeming,' 1905; Kittel, 'Über den Ursprung des Lingakultus in Indien,' 1876; Laurent and Nagour, 'L'occultisme et l'amour'; Maehly, 'Die Schlange im Mythos und Cultus der classischen Völker,' 1867; de Mortillet, 'Le Signe de la Croix avant le Christianisme,' 1866; Sellon, 'Phallic Worship in India,' *Memoirs of the Anthropological Society*, vol. i., and 'Annotations on the Sacred Writings of the Hindus,' New Edition 1902; Storfer, *op. cit.* A number of recent books—e.g., those by Bayley, Blount, Churchward, Hannay—are of much less value than their pretensions would suggest.



perhaps, some light may be thrown by the considerations that will be discussed below in connection with the genesis of symbolism.

All symbols represent ideas of the self and the immediate blood relatives, or of the phenomena of birth, love, and death. In other words, they represent the most primitive ideas and interests imaginable. The actual number of ideas is rather greater, however, than might be supposed from the briefness of this summary—they amount, perhaps, to about a hundred—and a few supplementary remarks are necessary. The self comprises the whole body or any separate part of it, not the mind; perhaps twenty different ideas can here be symbolised. The relatives include only father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter; various parts of their bodies also can be symbolised. Birth can refer to the ideas of giving birth, of begetting, or of being born oneself. The idea of death is in the unconscious a relatively simple one, that of lasting absence; it always refers to the death of others, for the idea of one's own death is probably inconceivable as such in the unconscious, being always converted into some other one.<sup>1</sup> Love, or more strictly sexuality, comprises a very considerable number of distinct processes, including some, such as excretory acts, that are not commonly recognised to have a sexual bearing; it would lead us too far to enumerate and describe them all here, but it may be said that the total conception thus reached closely corresponds with Freud's theory of sex.<sup>2</sup> The field of sexual symbolism is an astoundingly rich and varied one, and the vast majority of all symbols belong to this category.<sup>3</sup> There are probably more symbols of the male organ itself than all other symbols put together. This is a totally unexpected finding, even more so than the paucity of symbolised ideas in general, and is so difficult to reconcile with our sense of proportion that it needs an effort to refuse the easy escape of simply denying the facts, a feat which is greatly facilitated by the circumstance that, thanks to our education, the facts are not very accessible. Rank and Sachs' comments in this connection are of interest:<sup>4</sup> 'Das Prävalieren der sexuellen Symbolbedeutungen erklärt sich nicht nur aus der individuellen Tatsache, dass kein Trieb

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XXXIII., p. 580.

<sup>2</sup> See Freud, 'Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie,' 1905, or Chapter III. of the present volume.

<sup>3</sup> See Schlesinger, *op. cit.*, S. 437 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> Rank and Sachs, *op. cit.*, S. 12.

in dem Masse der kulturellen Unterdrückung unterworfen und der direkten Befriedigung entzogen ist, wie der aus den verschiedensten "perversen" Komponenten zusammengesetzte Sexualtrieb, dessen psychischer Vorstellungskreis, das Erotische, daher in weitem Umfang der indirekten Darstellung fähig und bedürftig ist. Eine weit grössere Bedeutung für die Genese der Symbolik hat die phylogenetische Tatsache, dass den Geschlechtsorganen und -Funktionen in primitiven Kulturen eine für unsere Begriffe ganz ungeheure Wichtigkeit beigelegt war, von der wir uns durch die Tatsachen der ethnographischen Forschung und die in Kult und Mythos erhaltenen Reste eine annähernde Vorstellung machen können.' ('The prevalence of sexual meanings in symbolism is not to be explained merely by the individual experience that no other instinct is to the same extent subjected to social suppression and withdrawn from direct gratification as the sexual one, that instinct built up from multiform "perverse" components, and the mental domain of which, the erotic, is therefore extensively susceptible of, and in need of, indirect representation. Much more significant for the genesis of symbolism is the phylogenetic fact that in primitive civilisations an importance was attached to sexual organs and functions that to us appears absolutely monstrous, and of which we can form some approximate idea from the results of anthropological investigations and the traces remaining in cults and myths.')

### III. GENESIS OF SYMBOLISM.

Having formulated a conception of the nature, characteristics, and content of symbolism, we may proceed to the more difficult questions of its genesis. Our point of departure is that in symbolism a comparison between two ideas, of a kind that is alien to the conscious mind, is established unconsciously, and that then one of these—which for the sake of convenience may be called the secondary idea—may unknowingly be substituted for, and so represent, the first or primary idea. Two questions immediately arise from this statement: Why are two ideas identified which the conscious mind does not find to be similar? And why does the one idea symbolise the other and never the reverse?

Taking the former question first, we begin by noting that it is the primitive mind which institutes the comparison between

the two ideas, not the adult, conscious mind. This conclusion is confirmed by everything we know about symbolism, the type of mental process, the high antiquity—in both the individual and the race—of the actual symbols themselves, and so forth; even the few new symbols that are made by the adult—*e.g.*, the Zeppelin one—are created by the primitive, infantile mind that persists throughout life in the unconscious.

Just as the simile is the base of every metaphor, so is an original identification the base of every symbolism, though it is important not to confound these two processes. As Freud puts it:<sup>1</sup> 'Was heute symbolisch verbunden ist, war wahrscheinlich in Urzeiten durch begriffliche und sprachliche Identität vereint. Die Symbolbeziehung scheint ein Rest und Merkzeichen einstiger Identität.' ('What to-day is symbolically connected was probably in primæval times united in conceptual and linguistic identity. The symbolic relationship seems to be the remains and sign of an identity that once existed.')

The tendency of the primitive mind—as observed in children, in savages, in wit, dreams, insanity, and other products of unconscious functioning—to identify different objects and to fuse together different ideas, to note the resemblances and not the differences, is a universal and most characteristic feature, though only those familiar with the material in question will appreciate the colossal scale on which it is manifested. It impresses one as being one of the most fundamental and primordial attributes of the mind. In explanation of it there are two hypotheses, which, as they are implicit throughout this section, and, indeed, in the whole essay, may be briefly indicated at this point. The one most usually accepted would refer the phenomenon under discussion, as well as most others of symbolism, to the structure of the undeveloped mind, for which reason it might be termed the static hypothesis; the main feature to which they call attention is the intellectual incapacity for discrimination. The second, psycho-analytical hypothesis, while admitting the importance of this factor, holds that it is in itself insufficient to explain all the phenomena, and postulates other, dynamic factors as well.

In my opinion, not one, but three factors, are operative in this general primitive tendency to identification. The first, which is the only one usually recognised, but which I think is much the least important, is that of mental incapacity.

<sup>1</sup> Freud, 'Die Traumdeutung,' *loc. cit.*

The second, which I shall point out presently, has to do with the 'pleasure-pain principle,' and the third, to which Rank and Sachs call attention, with the 'reality principle.'<sup>1</sup>

The first factor, which I think I shall be able to prove cannot be exclusive, is well indicated in the following passages. Pelletier says:<sup>2</sup> 'Il est à remarquer que le symbole joue un très grand rôle dans les divagations des aliénés; cela est dû à ce que le symbole est une forme très inférieure de la pensée. On pourrait définir le symbole comme la perception fausse d'un rapport d'identité ou d'analogie très grande entre deux objets qui ne présentent en réalité qu'une analogie vague.' We shall see that the disproportion in the importance of the analogy depends on the different points of view of the patient and the doctor rather than on any intellectual inferiority of the former. Jung, from a similar standpoint, writes:<sup>3</sup> 'Die apperzeptive Schwäche drückt sich in einer verminderten Deutlichkeit der Vorstellungen aus. Sind die Vorstellungen undeutlich, so sind auch ihre Unterschiede undeutlich.' ('The apperceptive defect is manifested in a lessened clearness of ideas. If the ideas are not clear, neither are the differences between them.') He says further: 'Ich will nur hervorheben, dass die *Vielseitigkeit der einzelnen Traumbilder* ("Überdeterminierung" Freuds)<sup>4</sup> mit ein Zeichen ist für die Undeutlichkeit und Unbestimmtheit des Traumdenkens. . . . Wegen der im Traum herrschenden *mangelhaften Unterschiedsempfindlichkeit* können die beiden Komplexinhalte wenigstens in symbolischer Form ineinanderfließen.' ('I will only point out that the many significations of the individual dream images (Freud's "over-determination")<sup>5</sup> is a sign of the lack of clarity and definition in dream thought. Because of the defective sensibility for differences that prevails in dreams, the contents of both complexes can become confounded at least in symbolic form.') Both these authors were probably influenced by the common, but fallacious, view of dreams and insanity as *defective* mental products. Silberer, however, approaching the matter from quite another point of view, also writes:<sup>6</sup> 'Ich entferne mich durchaus nicht von der Mehrzahl der Autoren, wenn ich die hauptsächlichste und

<sup>1</sup> For the exact sense in which these terms are used see Chapter I.

<sup>2</sup> Pelletier, 'L'association des idées dans la manie aiguë,' 1903, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> Jung, 'Über die Psychologie der Dementia præcox,' 1907, S. 72.

<sup>4</sup> This is the same as the condensation, or over-identification, under discussion.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Silberer, *Jahrbuch der Psychoanalyse*, Bd. iii., S. 680.

allgemeinste Bedingung der Symbolbildung, die sowohl den normalen als den krankhaften Phänomenen in der Individual—wie in der Völkerpsychologie gerecht wird, in einer *Unzulänglichkeit* des Auffassungsvermögens seinem Gegenstande gegenüber oder, wie man auch sagen könnte, in einer *apperzeptiven Insuffizienz* erblicke.' ('In agreement with the majority of writers, I see the chief and most general condition of symbol-formation—valid with the phenomena of health and disease, in the individual and in the race—in an *inadequacy* of the apprehensive faculty in regard to its object, or, as one might also say, in an *apperceptive insufficiency*.') We may admit the presence of this factor so far as it goes, but I think it can be shewn that what passes for an apperceptive incapacity is very often a non-functioning that is due to other causes than incapacity. It is true that the primitive mind very often does not discriminate, but that is not because it cannot, for when it is necessary it does so to a remarkable extent.

The second factor leading to lack of discrimination is that when the primitive mind is presented with a new experience it seizes on the resemblances, however slight, between it and previous experiences; and this for two reasons, both of which have to do with the pleasure-pain principle. The first of these is that the mind—above all the primitive mind, which is ruled by this principle—notices most what most *interests* it personally, what, therefore, is most pleasurable or most painful. It ignores distinctions between two ideas when they are indifferent to it, and notices only those that are interesting. Where one is so apt to go wrong in this matter is in the assumption, difficult to avoid in practice, that the interests of the primitive mind are necessarily the same as our own conscious ones, the truth being that the relative proportion of interest is often astoundingly different in the two cases. The unexpected associations made by a child when confronted by a novelty are often very amusing to us—for example, the remark that soda-water tastes like a foot that has gone to sleep. Darwin's oft-quoted example of the child who, on first seeing a duck, onomatopoeetically named it 'quack,' and then later applied this word also to flies, wine, and even a sou (which had eagle's wings), is rightly explained by Meumann,<sup>1</sup> who points out that the child noticed only what interested him—namely, the flying and the relation to fluid, and so used this word to denote these

<sup>1</sup> Meumann, 'Die Sprache des Kindes,' 1903.

two phenomena in whatever form they occurred; it was not the duck as a whole that was named 'quack,' but only certain abstracted attributes, which then continued to be called by the same word. The second of the two reasons referred to above is of a more general and far-reaching order. When a new experience is presented to the mind it is certainly *easier* to perceive the points of resemblance between it and previous familiar experiences. One often hears, for instance, such a remark as 'The ideas in that book were too strange for me to take in on first reading it; I must go through it again before passing an opinion on it.' In such a case if one notices only the points of resemblance there is effected an obvious economy of effort, which is a fundamental human trait: Ferrero<sup>1</sup> aptly refers to it under the terms 'la loi de l'inertie mental' and 'la loi du moindre effort.' This is, of course, governed by the hedonic pleasure-pain principle, though the fact is often obscured by writers on ethics. The association between ease and pleasure, and between difficulty or labour and pain, is a primordial one, and is well illustrated by the words used to denote them. The word 'painful' was used in Middle English in the sense of industrious. The French *travail*, work, is cognate with the Italian *travaglio*, which means suffering; the Italian word for work, *lavoro*, comes from the Latin *labor*, pain. The Greek *πένωμαι* means both to work and to suffer, as does the Hebrew *assab*. We appropriately refer to child-birth as labour.

The third factor in preventing discrimination is not sharply to be distinguished from the last one, though it refers rather to the 'reality principle.' It is clear that the appreciation of resemblances facilitates the assimilation of new experiences. Our instinctive tendency in such a situation is to link on the new to the old, to search for common ground. If we can relate the new experience in some way to what is already familiar, then we can 'place' it and understand it; it becomes intelligible. The whole meaning of comprehension and explanation is the referring of the unknown to the known. In this way the process of fusion or identification aids our grasp of reality and makes it possible for us to deal with it more adequately. It is true that it is a process with grave possibilities of defects, it being an everyday occurrence that we assimilate the new too closely in terms of the old, but to assimilate it at least in some degree is the only way in which we can deal with it at all.

<sup>1</sup> Ferrero, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 18, 23.

Rank and Sachs<sup>1</sup> have an illuminating passage on the relation of symbolism to this primary identification in the service of adaptation: 'Psychologisch betrachtet bleibt die Symbolbildung ein Regressivphänomen, ein Herabsinken auf eine bestimmte Stufe bildlichen Denkens, die sich beim vollwertigen Kulturmenschen in deutlichster Ausprägung in jenen Ausnahmzuständen findet, in denen die bewusste Realanpassung entweder teilweise eingeschränkt ist, wie in der religiösen und künstlerischen Exstase, oder gänzlich aufgehoben erscheint, wie im Traum und den Geistesstörungen. Dieser psychologischen Auffassung entspricht die kulturhistorisch nachweisbare ursprüngliche Funktion der *der Symbolisierung zugrunde liegenden Identifizierung*<sup>2</sup> als eines Mittels zur Realanpassung, das überflüssig wird und zur blossen Bedeutung eines Symbols herabsinkt, sobald diese Anpassungsleistung geglückt ist. So erscheint die Symbolik als der unbewusste Niederschlag überflüssig und unbrauchbar gewordener primitiver Anpassungsmittel an die Realität, gleichsam als eine Rumpelkammer der Kultur, in die der erwachsene Mensch in Zuständen herabgesetzt oder mangelnder Anpassungsfähigkeit gerne flüchtet, um seine alten, längst vergessenen Kinderspielzeuge wieder hervorzuholen. Was spätere Generationen nur noch als Symbol kennen und auffassen, das hatte auf früheren Stufen geistigen Lebens vollen realen Sinn und Wert. Im Laufe der Entwicklung verblasst die ursprüngliche Bedeutung immer mehr oder wandelt sich sogar, wobei allerdings Sprache, Folklore, Witz, u.a., oft Reste des ursprünglichen Zusammenhangs in mehr oder weniger deutlicher Bewusstheit bewahrt haben.' ('Psychologically considered, symbol-formation remains a regressive phenomenon, a reversion to a certain stage of pictorial thinking, which in fully civilised man is most plainly seen in those exceptional conditions in which conscious adaptation to reality is either restricted, as in religious and artistic ecstasy, or seems to be completely abrogated, as in dreams and mental disorders. In correspondence with this psychological conception is the original function, demonstrable in the history of civilisation, of the identification underlying symbolism<sup>3</sup> as a means to adaptation to reality, which becomes superfluous and sinks to the mere significance of a symbol as soon as this task of adapta-

<sup>1</sup> Rank and Sachs, *op. cit.*, S. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Note how carefully the authors distinguish between identification and symbolism in this connection.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

tion has been accomplished. Symbolism thus appears as the unconscious precipitate of primitive means of adaptation to reality that have become superfluous and useless, a sort of lumber-room of civilisation to which the adult readily flees in states of reduced or deficient capacity for adaptation to reality, in order to regain his old, long-forgotten playthings of childhood. What later generations know and regard only as a symbol had in earlier stages of mental life full and real meaning and value. In the course of development the original significance fades more and more or even changes, though speech, folk-lore, wit, etc., have often preserved more or less plain traces of the original association.)

The two last factors mentioned, the importance of the pleasure-pain principle and of adaptation to reality in respect to primitive lack of discrimination, throw some light on one of the most puzzling phenomena of symbolism—namely, the extraordinary predominance of sexual symbols. A Swedish philologist, Sperber,<sup>1</sup> has in a remarkable essay elaborated the theory, which has been several times suggested on other grounds by biologists, that sexual impulses have played the most important part in both the origin and later development of speech. According to this theory, which is supported by very weighty considerations, the earliest speech sounds were those that served the purpose of calling the mate (hence the sexual importance of the voice to this day), while the further development of speech roots accompanied the performance of work. Such work was done in common, and, as is still customary enough, to the accompaniment of rhythmically repeated speech utterances. During this, sexual interest was attached to the work, as though, so to speak, primitive man reconciled himself to the disagreeable but necessary task by treating it as an equivalent of, and substitute for, sexual functioning. Words used during these common tasks thus had two meanings, denoting the sexual act and the equivalent work done respectively. In time the former meaning became detached and the word, now applying only to the work, thus 'desexualised.' The same would happen with other tasks, and so a store of speech roots gradually accumulated, the original sexual significance of which had been lost. Sperber then illustrates, with an extensive material, the fact that words having a sexual connotation

<sup>1</sup> Sperber, 'Über den Einfluss sexueller Momente auf Entstehung und Entwicklung der Sprache,' *Imago*, 1912, Jahrg. i., S. 405.



possess a perfectly astounding capacity for development and extension into non-sexual fields. Partly owing to the careful expurgation of our etymological dictionaries, it is not generally known that an enormous number of common words in present-day use have been derived in historical times from this source, attaining their present meaning through a primary sexual association that has now been forgotten. In the light of work like Sperber's we begin to understand why there is such an amazing number of symbols for sexual objects and functions, and, for instance, why weapons and tools are always male symbols, while the material that is worked on is always female. The symbolic association is the relic of the old verbal identity; things that once had the same name as a genital organ can now appear in dreams, etc., as a symbol for it. Freud<sup>1</sup> aptly likens symbolism to an ancient speech that has almost vanished, but of which relics still remain here and there.

According, then, to the view here developed, the identification that underlies symbolism is mainly determined by the two factors discussed above, which may be summarised as the tendencies to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and to learn to deal with reality in the easiest and most sparing way. It was just the way in which primitive man must have met the world, the desire for ease and pleasure struggling with the demands of necessity. He succeeded by making a compromise in which he sexualised his tasks. A few examples may be given from the vast subject of the associations between ploughing in particular, or agriculture in general, and sexual activities. Most of the tools used are phallic symbols (the word itself is the commonest vulgar designation), a statement that can easily be proved from folk-lore and mythology, while the conception of the earth as woman, and especially as mother, is universal and fundamental.<sup>2</sup> Sophocles' *Œdipus* repeatedly speaks of 'the mother-field from which I sprouted.' Shakespeare makes Boult, on the point of deflorating the recalcitrant Marina, say: 'An if she were a thornier piece of ground than she is, she shall be ploughed.'<sup>3</sup> The words for 'plough' in Latin, Greek, and Oriental languages were customarily used also to denote the sexual act,<sup>4</sup> and we still use such words as

<sup>1</sup> Freud, 'Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse,' Zweiter Teil; 'Der Traum,' 1916, S. 181.

<sup>2</sup> See Dieterich, 'Mutter Erde,' 2<sup>e</sup> Aufl., 1913.

<sup>3</sup> 'Pericles,' Act IV., Sc. vi.

<sup>4</sup> Kleinpaul, 'Das Leben der Sprache,' Bd. iii., 1893, S. 136.

'seed,' 'fertility,' 'barrenness,' for vegetation as well as for human beings. The association becomes quite manifest in the well-known fertilising magic, a custom that lasted late into civilised times; it consisted in a naked pair performing the sexual act in the field, so as to encourage the latter to imitate their example. The Greek words for garden, meadow, field, common female symbols, were used also to denote the female genital organ.

If, as is here maintained, the individual child re-creates such symbolism anew—*i.e.*, if he (largely unconsciously) perceives these comparisons which are alien to the adult conscious mind—then it is plain that we shall have radically to revise our conception of the infantile mind, and especially in regard to sexuality. This has already been done by Freud on other grounds, after he had empirically discovered from psycho-analyses that the unconscious mind of the child, and even the conscious one, is much more sexual in character than had ever been supposed.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the whole process to which he has given the name 'sublimation'<sup>2</sup> is probably an ontogenetic repetition of the one just described, whereby sexual energy is gradually drained into other non-sexual channels. The activity—tasks in the life of primitive man, games in that of the child—becomes by degrees independent of this source of interest that is not inherent in itself, but the ancient association remains in the unconscious, where in suitable circumstances it may again manifest itself in the form of symbolism.

It will not have escaped the attentive reader that in this discussion all the stress has been laid on the defective discrimination shewn by the primitive mind, while nothing has been said about the respects in which it shews an unwonted power of discrimination.<sup>3</sup> Yet this also is a striking characteristic of both children and savages, though not of the unconscious mind. In the latter case, that of savages, it has curiously been used as an argument in support of the current theory of the defective intellectual powers on the part of the primitive, but, in my judgement, closer consideration proves just the contrary. Herbert Spencer, in his 'Principles of Sociology,' has collected a series of examples where there are many separate words for

<sup>1</sup> Freud, 'Drei Abhandlungen,' *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter XXXV.

<sup>3</sup> A consideration which in itself finally proves that the prevalent hypothesis of the primitive lack of discrimination—that this is due to intellectual incapacity—is inadequate to cover the whole ground.

individual acts, but no generic one for the act itself—thus, thirty words for washing different parts of the body and none for the act of washing. The Arabians are said to have over 500 words to designate lions in various aspects, but no word for lion; 5,744 for camels, but none for a camel. This is certainly a powerful argument against any inherent incapacity for discrimination, as the holders of that hypothesis maintain exists. Whereupon they simply change their ground, and, being bent on convicting the primitive of intellectual inferiority, they now quote such facts to shew that he is incapable of abstracting; this is, at all events, a different thing from being incapable of discriminating. Thus, Stout<sup>1</sup> writes: 'It certainly appears odd that a lower grade of intellectual development should be marked by superior nicety and precision of discriminative thought. The truth is that these distinctions, so plentiful in savage languages, are due rather to an incapacity for clearly apprehending identity in difference than to a superior power of apprehending difference in identity.' This argument, however, has been very neatly disposed of by Hocart,<sup>2</sup> who has pointed out that the key to the whole question is the matter of interest. Comparing the Fijian language with English, as an example, he shews that the Fijian handles in gross where we do in retail, but that the converse is equally true. Where our interest is very great we have no generic terms, because the differences are so important as to overshadow the resemblances; in such cases the Fijian, with less interest, will use a general and often vague term to cover the whole. The distinction, for instance, is so important among a bull, a cow, an ox, a steer, a calf, a bullock, a heifer, and so on, that we have no single word to denote the species as a whole except cattle, which is collective. Indeed, the same law may be observed to hold good even between different classes in the same country. The laity uses the generic term 'horse,' but a horse-dealer—*i.e.*, some one with a great interest in the matter—has no such generic term; to him a horse is a certain variety of the animal and is different from a stallion or a mare. Similarly, we speak of ships as a class of objects of which there are many varieties, but to a sailor a ship is definitely a vessel with a bowsprit and at least two square-rigged masts; the distinctions between different vessels are to him more important than the resemblances.

<sup>1</sup> Stout, 'Analytic Psychology,' 1902, vol. ii., p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Hocart, *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. v., p. 267.

It is well known that abstract terms arise originally from concrete ones; we see here that they characteristically arise as a generalisation from a single example: thus, the order of development seems to be concrete, general, abstract. This conclusion can also be supported from consideration of the order of development of the parts of speech. Thus, as Wundt shews,<sup>1</sup> adjectives, which are of relatively late development, had originally the same form as substantives, and were, to begin with, merely special nouns. For example, a brown leaf and a green leaf were two distinct words, having nothing in common with words for other objects that are red or green. Then one of these 'green' words, one where the element of greenness was very prominent (perhaps with leaves), was extended to other objects when it was wished to call special attention to the green aspect of this object—*e.g.*, a green-leaf cloth—losing in time its substantival connotation of leaf. It is known, for instance, that the Greenlanders have separate names for each finger, and that when they want to use a name for fingers in general they employ the name of the principal one (the thumb) for this purpose. They are here reaching from the particular to the general, the first stage of conceiving the abstract.

It will be seen that our custom of using the word 'ship' to denote all sea-going vessels constitutes in type a reversion to the primitive, infantile custom of not discriminating from relative lack of interest, and so, in a sense, is all generalisation. The essential difference between what is called a valuable generalisation—*e.g.*, a scientific one—and the simple grouping together characteristic of the primitive mind resides in the practical worth of the generalisation. To the child, no doubt, its identifications are as useful personally as a great generalisation is to a man of science, but, while they may be equal subjectively, they are not objectively. The second kind takes into better account the facts of external reality, is altogether on a more real and less subjective plane; in short, there is all the difference that exists between the simple pleasure-pain principle and the reality principle. From this point of view there opens the possibility, which cannot be followed up here, of a theory of scientific discovery, invention, etc., for psychologically this consists in an overcoming of the resistances that normally prevent regression towards the infantile, unconscious tendency to note 'identity in differences,' the whole being, of course,

<sup>1</sup> Wundt, 'Völkerpsychologie,' Bd. i., Teil ii., 1904, S. 289.

worked out on the plane of reality, though the impetus comes from the association between the unconscious ideas that the 'real' external ones can symbolise.

We have next to turn to the second of the two questions raised at the beginning of this section—namely, why it is that of two ideas unconsciously associated one always symbolises the other and never the reverse. To illustrate by an example what is meant: a church tower in a dream, as in anthropology, often—though, of course, by no means always—symbolises the phallus, but a phallus in a dream is never a symbol of a church tower. This fact alone demolishes the hypothesis that symbolism is due solely to any apperceptive insufficiency, from an inability to perceive differences, because in that case there would be no reason why the symbolism should not be reciprocal. The point is clearly put by Ferenczi, who writes:<sup>1</sup> 'One was formerly inclined to believe that things are confounded because they are similar; nowadays we know that a thing is confounded with another only because certain motives for this are present; similarity merely provides the opportunity for these motives to function.' Assuming, then, that two ideas have become closely associated, in the way described above, what are the motives that lead to one of the ideas replacing the other, whereas the reverse never occurs? The answer will, of course, be found only by consideration of the material content of the ideas themselves. The two most prominent features that strike one in regard to these are: First, that the ideas symbolised are the most primordial that it is possible to conceive, and that they are the ideas invested with the strongest primary interest. Secondly, that attaching to them all are powerful affective and conative processes which are in a state of psychical repression, being thus inhibited from entry into consciousness and free external expression. They are, in fact, the most completely repressed mental processes known.

It is impossible not to connect these two considerations. It is a well-established observation of clinical psychology that when a strong affective tendency is repressed it often leads to a compromise-formation—neurotic symptoms being perhaps the best-known example—in which both the repressed and the repressing tendencies are fused, the result being a substitution-product. From this it is a very slight step to infer that sym-

<sup>1</sup> Ferenczi, 'Contributions to Psycho-Analysis,' English Translation by Ernest Jones, 1916, p. 237.

bols are also of this nature, for it is known that they, like other compromise-formations, are composed of both conscious and unconscious elements. Symbolism certainly plays an important part in many neurotic symptoms; a castration complex, for instance, often results in a phobia of blindness, the eye being one of the commonest somatic phallic symbols.<sup>1</sup> That symbolism arises as the result of intrapsychical conflict between the repressing tendencies and the repressed is the view accepted by all psycho-analysts. It is implicit, for instance, in Ferenczi's<sup>2</sup> actual definition of symbols as 'such ideas as are invested in consciousness with a logically inexplicable and unfounded affect, and of which it may be analytically established that they owe this affective over-emphasis to *unconscious* identification with another idea, to which the surplus of affect really belongs. Not all similes, therefore, are symbols, but only those in which the one member of the equation is repressed into the unconscious.' According to him, the most primary kind of symbolism is probably the equating of one part of the body with another, one subsequently replacing the other;<sup>3</sup> there thus comes about an over-emphasis of the upper part of the body in general, interest in the lower half being repressed (Freud's 'displacement from below upwards').

All psycho-analytical experience goes to shew that the primary ideas of life, the only ones that can be symbolised—those, namely, concerning the bodily self, the relation to the family, birth, love, and death—retain in the unconscious throughout life their original importance, and that from them is derived a very large part of the more secondary interests of the conscious mind. As energy flows from them, and never to them, and as they constitute the most repressed part of the mind, it is comprehensible that symbolism should take place in one direction only. Only what is repressed is symbolised; only what is repressed needs to be symbolised. This conclusion is the touchstone of the psycho-analytical theory of symbolism.

#### IV. FUNCTIONAL SYMBOLISM.

The theory of symbolism just described is manifestly not complete; it does not, for instance, explain why only certain possible comparisons are used as symbols, nor why some symbols

<sup>1</sup> See Ferenczi, 'On Eye Symbolism,' *op. cit.*, p. 228-232.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

are found predominantly in certain fields—*e.g.*, dreams—and others mainly in different fields—*e.g.*, wit. While, however, the theory needs amplifying and supplementing, I would maintain that it does at least begin to introduce order into a confused subject, notably in the distinction it establishes between symbolism and other forms of figurative representation.

Further progress in clarification may be gained by examination of the work of what may be called the post-psycho-analytical school of writers, Adler, Jung, Maeder, Silberer, Stekel, with their English followers, Eder, Long, and Nicoll. The feature common to the members of this school is that, after gaining some knowledge of psycho-analysis, they have proceeded, by rejecting the hardly-won knowledge of the unconscious, to re-interpret the psycho-analytical findings back again into the surface meanings characteristic of pre-Freudian experience, retaining, however, the psycho-analytical technical terms, though using them with quite different implications. The conception of symbolism has especially suffered from the confusion thus re-introduced, for it has been diluted to such an extent as to lose all exact descriptive value. Thus, Jung makes constant use of the term 'Libido-symbol,' but, as *Libido* means to him psychical energy in whatever form and symbol means simply any form of indirect representation, the term comes to mean merely 'any mental process that is substituted for any other.' He does not hesitate to use the term 'symbol' in precisely the reverse sense from that in which it is used in psycho-analysis. Take the case of a patient where an associative connection has been established between a given symptom (*e.g.*, inhibition in performing a particular act) and an unconscious incest complex.<sup>1</sup> By the psycho-analyst the symptom would be regarded as the result of the complex and, in certain circumstances, as a symbol for it; Jung, on the other hand, calls the complex the symbol of the symptom—*i.e.*, according to him, an unconscious idea may be a symbol of a conscious one.

Silberer's work is in some respects in a different category from that of the other writers mentioned, for he is the only member of this school who has made a positive contribution to the theory of symbolism; unfortunately, incautious presentation of even this has made it possible for other writers, particularly Stekel, to exploit it in a reactionary sense. His work,

<sup>1</sup> The example is taken from Jung's 'Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology,' Second Edition, 1917, pp. 219, 220.

which is incorporated in half a dozen essays,<sup>1</sup> deserves, however, to be carefully read by any one seriously interested in the problems of symbolism, and a short abstract of it will be attempted here.

In his first contribution already Silberer<sup>2</sup> set forth the two most original points in his work, both of which he later expanded in great detail; one relates to the conditions favourable to the production of symbolism, the other to the distinction between different types of symbolism. As will be seen, he uses the term in a much wider sense than that given it in the two preceding sections of this paper. His starting-point was the personal observation that, when he was endeavouring to think out a difficult problem in a state of fatigue or drowsiness, a visual picture appeared which, on analysis, was soon seen to be a pictorial representation of the ideas in question. To this he gave the perhaps not very appropriate term of 'auto-symbolic phenomenon.' This itself he divides into three classes, according to the content of what is symbolised: (1) 'Functional phenomena,' in which is represented *the way in which* the mind is functioning (quickly, slowly, lightly, heavily, cheerfully, carelessly, successfully, fruitlessly, strainedly, etc.). (2) 'Material phenomena,' in which *what* the mind is thinking is symbolised—*i.e.*, ideas. (3) 'Somatic phenomena,' in which bodily sensations are symbolised. Silberer<sup>3</sup> emphatically denies that in this division there is implied any manner of genetic difference between the three classes; in my opinion, this is an important error which becomes later the source of many misunderstandings. He holds, further,<sup>3</sup> that the functional symbolism never occurs alone, but only as an accompaniment of the others.

We will next follow Silberer's development of the first question, concerning the conditions under which symbolism arises. The first situation he studied was where there was an equal-sided conflict between the desire to go to sleep and some factor disturbing this, either mental (effort to work, etc.) or

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, 'Bericht über eine Methode, gewisse symbolische Halluzinations Erscheinungen hervorzurufen und zu beobachten,' *Jahrbuch der Psychoanalyse*, 1909, Bd. i., S. 513; 'Von den Kategorien der Symbolik,' *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*, Jahrg. ii., S. 177; 'Phantasie und Mythos,' *Jahrbuch*, Bd. ii., S. 541; 'Symbolik des Erwachens und Schwellensymbolik überhaupt,' *Jahrbuch*, Bd. iii., S. 621; 'Über die Symbolbildung,' *ibid.*, S. 661; 'Zur Symbolbildung,' *Jahrbuch*, Bd. iv., S. 607.

<sup>2</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* i., S. 515.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* ii., S. 558; *Jahrb.* iii., S. 688; *Jahrb.* iv., S. 610.



physical. It will be noticed that this differs from the psychical situation which, according to Freud, is responsible for dreams merely in that in the latter case the desire is to continue sleeping; in both cases it is desire for sleep *versus* some disturbance. He soon described the conditions in wider terms,<sup>1</sup> the conflict being between the effort towards apperception of any idea on the one side and any factor that made this difficult on the other; the latter factor may be either temporary, such as sleepiness, fatigue, illness, and so on, or more permanent, such as relative intellectual incapacity in comparison with the complexity of the idea. In his most elaborate analysis of the psychical situation he formulated the following factors.<sup>2</sup> Symbolism tends to arise either when one's mental capacity is *no longer* equal to grasping a set of ideas that one formerly could, the result of fatigue, illness, etc., or else when the mental capacity of the individual or of the race is *not yet* able to grasp an idea which some day in the future it will. In both cases it will be possible on some other occasion to recognise that the symbolism is either a regression to or a non-emergence from an inferior and more primitive mode of thought, more primitive both in being sensorial instead of conceptual and in being associative instead of apperceptive (in Wundt's terminology). Now, the factors concerned in symbolism can be divided into two groups: (1) What Silberer calls the *positive factors*, those tending to bring a given idea into consciousness or to keep it there; and (2) the *negative factors* that prevent it from entering consciousness in an apperceptive form, and only allow it to enter in a sensorial form—*i.e.*, as symbolism.

Silberer derives the energy of the positive factors from two sources: in the first place from the affect investing the idea in question—*i.e.*, from the dynamic forward-moving tendency of the mental process itself; and, in the second place, from the conscious wish to think in this particular direction. He writes (of the positive factor):<sup>3</sup> 'Er hat den erforderlichen Anspruch auf meine Aufmerksamkeit schon von selbst, durch den Affekt, den er mit sich führt, oder ich erteile ihm diesen Anspruch, indem ich den für mein Gefühlsleben an sich uninteressanten Gedanken kraft meines Willens aufgreife und festhalte, ihn also absichtlich meiner Aufmerksamkeit als interessant emp-

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* ii., S. 612; *Jahrb.* iii., S. 676.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 683, 684, 717; *Jahrb.* iv., S. 608, 611.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iv., S. 611.

fehle.' ('It either makes the necessary claim on my attention on its own account, through the affect it brings with it, or I grant it this claim by using my will-power to select and hold to a thought which in itself is of no interest to my feelings, and so deliberately recommend it to my attention as an interesting matter.') This division is simply the psychologist's distinction between passive and active attention. To the psychoanalyst the difference is that in the former case the interest (to the ego) is inherent and direct, whereas in the latter case it is due to an indirect association.

The negative factors he also divides into two classes, both of which result in a state of relative apperceptive insufficiency (see quotation in Section III.). They are (1) intellectual in kind, either imperfect development (individual or racial) of mental capacity or a transitory weakening of the apperceptive function through a general diminution of mental energy (sleep, fatigue); (2) affective, which either hinder the entrance of the idea by means of the pleasure-pain mechanism (repression) or allow autonomous complexes to rob the function of attention of a part of its energy and so lead to a general diminution of the apperceptive capacity. The affects thus have both a specific and a general effect as negative factors. In addition, they often also act positively, for they themselves may force their way into consciousness, in symbolic guise, instead of the other ideas they have just inhibited. It is clear that in this last point Silberer is referring to repressing forces, to the inhibiting affects that go to make up Freud's 'censor,' and we shall see that it is to this aspect of the conflict that he devotes most attention. His attitude to Freud's conception of repression and censorship is indicated by his remark that the resistance shewn in dream analysis is the reverse side (*Kehrseite*) of the apperceptive insufficiency.<sup>1</sup>

Silberer recognises that the apperceptive weakness can never be the determining cause of any specific symbol,<sup>2</sup> and was thus led to formulate the statements above quoted regarding the 'positive factor'—*i.e.*, the determining cause. Nevertheless, his predominant interest is with the other side of the subject—namely, with the general conditions that predispose to symbolism. He is chiefly concerned with the factors that *allow* symbolism to occur more readily, rather than with the operative factors that actually bring it about; just as most psychologists

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 682.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, S. 678.

deal with the factors that favour the process of forgetting, not with those that actually make us forget. So when he comes to define the different kinds of processes grouped under the name symbolism—the task attempted in this paper—it is from this side alone (of general predisposition) that he attacks the problem. Speaking of the manifold causes of apperceptive insufficiency, he says:<sup>1</sup> 'Und damit ist eigentlich der Schlüssel gegeben zur einheitlichen Auffassung aller der Arten von Symbolbildung,'<sup>2</sup> die uns begegnen mögen. Denn nicht in dem Vorgange selbst scheinen mir die wesentlichen Unterschiede bei den verschiedenen Symbolphänomenen zu liegen; d.h. wenn sich auch die Symbolphänomene in Arten unterscheiden, so sind die Unterschiede in ihnen sekundäre Erscheinungen, die nicht die Symbolbildung als solche betreffen. Sondern die Unterschiede liegen primär in denjenigen Verhältnissen, welche die apperzeptive Insuffizienz hervorrufen.' ('It is here we really have the key for a unitary conception of all the kinds of symbol-formation'<sup>2</sup> that are to be found. For the essential differences in the different phenomena of symbolism do not seem to me to reside in the process itself—*i.e.*, although these phenomena fall into groups, the differences are secondary manifestations in them which do not concern the symbol-building as such. On the contrary, the differences reside primarily in the factors that bring about the apperceptive insufficiency.') The classification effected on this basis will be considered presently.

We have next to pursue the development of Silberer's ideas on the nature of the different forms of symbolism, as distinguished according to its content (see above). To the conception of 'somatic phenomena' he adds nothing further, and I will only remark that it is much more closely allied to that of 'functional' than to that of 'material phenomena.' These latter two groups of phenomena correspond so closely with the groupings of symbols based on another mode of classification that they may be considered together with them. In this second classification Silberer<sup>3</sup> divides symbols, not according to their content, as formerly, but according to the factors that have led to the apperceptive insufficiency which he regards as the fundamental basis of all symbolism. The two classes thus

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, *loc. cit.*, S. 683.

<sup>2</sup> The significance of this passage is heightened by the fact that the author is here using the word 'symbolism' in almost the same comprehensive sense in which the term 'indirect representation' is used in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 688; iv., S. 609.

distinguished he calls merely the first and second type respectively, but he makes it fairly plain elsewhere<sup>1</sup> that the material phenomenon is characteristic of the former and the functional of the latter. The first type is that which arises on the basis of an apperceptive insufficiency of purely intellectual origin, where the symbolised idea is not hindered by the influence of any affective complex; the second type arises, on the other hand, on the basis of an apperceptive insufficiency of affective origin. So the classification founded on the content (though not the nature) of the positive factors<sup>2</sup> comes to very much the same result as that founded on the variety of the negative or predisposing factors,<sup>3</sup> and we may use the terms 'material' and 'functional' to denote the two types respectively.

We saw above that Silberer's first conception of *functional symbolism* was that it represented the way in which the mind was working (slowly, quickly, etc.). In my experience, and, I may say, also in that of Professor Freud (oral communication), this is a very exceptional occurrence, and one that probably indicates a specially philosophic and introspective type of mind, such as Silberer's own (from which most of his examples are taken). Further, I am more than doubtful whether the functioning of the mind is ever pictorially represented apart from the occasions on which the mind actually feels, or thinks of, this functioning. In fact, I think this can be shewn to be so in the case of an interesting sub-variety of functional symbolism to which Silberer has given the name of 'threshold-symbolism' (*Schwellsymbolik*),<sup>3</sup> where the passage from one state of consciousness to another—*e.g.*, into or out of sleep—is indicated by appropriate imagery.

However this may be, Silberer soon enlarged the conception of functional symbolism in a quite surprising manner. He began by regarding the process of 'repression' as a mode of mental functioning, and coined for the pictorial representation of it the term 'cryptogenic symbolism.'<sup>4</sup> He then extended the conception to include practically all functions of the mind except the ideational, and to refer especially to all affective processes.<sup>5</sup> Here it is no longer a question of the *way in which* the mind is working, but of *what* is working in the mind.

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 717.

<sup>2</sup> For the meaning of these terms see above, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 621-660.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* ii., S. 580, 581.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 698, 717, 719.

According to him, therefore, the greater the extent to which affective moments are in play in the production of a given symbol, the more definitely does this belong to the second type of symbolism, characterised by the 'functional phenomenon.' This view is also in harmony with the very interesting remarks he makes on the relation of functional symbolism to gesture, language, mimicry,<sup>1</sup> etc., for, of course, the latter is simply an expression of the emotions.

If, now, we recall the strict sense of the word 'symbol,' as used in the previous section of this paper, it is evident that a symbol of that kind represents not only the idea symbolised, but also the affects relating to it, or, at all events, some of these. It does this in the same way as the simile indicates an adjectival attribute—namely, by likening the object in question to another one that obviously possesses this attribute, except that in the case of symbolism the one idea is altogether replaced by the other. The affective attitude in this way indicated may be either a positive or a negative one—*i.e.*, it may be either unconscious or conscious, the primary attitude or that resulting from repression. An example of the latter would be the well-known serpent symbol. This symbolises at the same time the phallus itself by means of the objective attributes common to both (shape, erectibility, habits—of emitting poison and of creeping into holes, etc.), and also a subjective attitude towards it, compounded of fear, horror, and disgust, that may in certain circumstances be present—*e.g.*, when the subject is a prudish virgin and the object belongs to a distasteful person.<sup>2</sup> Now, Silberer would call the two things here symbolised material and functional phenomena respectively, and he considers that psycho-analysts pay too much attention to the former to the relative exclusion of the latter; the explanation of this, however, is that in the interpretation of such symbols psycho-analysts are at the moment chiefly concerned with the positive meaning, the negative aspects being dealt with in another connection (resistance, repression, etc.). The noteworthy point here is that Silberer takes into consideration almost exclusively the negative or secondary affects, so that as a matter of practice the term 'functional symbolism' comes to be almost synonymous with the psycho-analytical 'censor'—*i.e.*, the inhibiting affects, or, at most, the positive affects that have been *modified*

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* ii., S. 547, 549; iii., S. 690.

<sup>2</sup> The positive affects of the complex are obviously also represented, else there would be no such thing as serpent-worship.

by the censor.<sup>1</sup> For Silberer, therefore, a psycho-analytical symbol is composed of a material phenomenon (idea symbolised) and a functional one (reactionary affects), both of which are usually conscious processes or nearly so, and he tends to leave out of account the real reason for the whole symbolism—namely, the unconscious, positive affects that are not allowed to appear in consciousness. His overlooking of this essential aspect of the problem accounts also for his curious statement<sup>2</sup> that the universality, or general validity and intelligibility, of a symbol varies inversely with the part played in its causation by affective factors, for it is just these symbols that are most characteristically universal. Relative unfamiliarity with the unconscious itself has here led him grossly to under-estimate the extent to which primitive affective trends are generic, though, it is true, he does verbally admit this in a limited degree.<sup>3</sup>

It is probably also this unfamiliarity, or lack of conviction, which leads Silberer to say that 'material' symbols can change into 'functional' ones, a matter which is worthy of special attention, since examination of it will, I think, reveal the essential differences between true symbolism and metaphor. He writes:<sup>4</sup> 'Es hat sich in neuerer Zeit bei psychanalytischen Untersuchungen gezeigt, dass Symbole, die ursprünglich material waren, in funktionale Verwendung übergehen. Analysiert man längere Zeit hindurch die Träume einer Person, so wird man finden, dass gewisse Symbole, die zuerst vielleicht nur gelegentlich auftraten zur Bezeichnung irgend eines Vorstellungsinhaltes, Wunschinhaltes, usw., wiederkehren und so zur stehenden Figur oder '*typischen Figur*' werden. Und jemehr sich eine solche typische Figur befestigt und ausprägt, um so mehr entfernt sie sich von der zuerst gehabten ephemeren Bedeutung; umso mehr wird sie zum symbolischen Stellvertreter einer ganzen Gruppe gleichartigen Erlebens, eines seelischen Kapitels sozusagen; bis man sie schliesslich als den Repräsentanten einer seelischen Strömung (Liebe, Hass, Tendenz zum Leichtsinne, zur Grausamkeit, zur Ängstlichkeit, usw.) schlechthin ansehen kann. Was sich da vollzogen hat, ist ein Übergang vom Materialen zum Funktionalen auf dem Weg einer *Verinnerlichung*, wie ich es nenne.' ('Recent psycho-analytic investigations have shewn that symbols which origin-

<sup>1</sup> In short, the affects of the preconscious, not of the unconscious.

<sup>2</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 689, 690; iv., S. 614.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 690.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Probleme der Mystik und ihrer Symbolik,' 1914, S. 153.

ally were material come to be used in a functional sense. If one analyses some one's dreams for a long time one finds that certain symbols, which perhaps at first made only an occasional appearance to denote the content of some idea or wish, keep recurring, and so become a standing or typical figure. And the more established and pronounced a typical figure of this sort becomes, the more do they recede from the original ephemeral signification, the more do they become the symbolic representative of a whole group of similar experiences, of, so to speak, a mental chapter, until finally one may regard them as simply the representatives of a mental tendency [love, hate, tendency to frivolity, to cruelty, to apprehensiveness, etc.]. What has happened there is a transition from the material to the functional by means of what I call an internal intensification.' This conclusion is, in my opinion, a fallacious interpretation of a correct observation. The observation is that after a patient has discovered the meaning of a (true) symbol he often strives to weaken and explain away the significance of this by trying to give it some other 'functional,' more general (and therefore more harmless) interpretation. These abstract and metaphorical interpretations do, it is true, bear a certain relationship to the fundamental meaning of the symbol, one which we shall have to examine presently, but the patient's strong preference for them is merely a manifestation of his resistance against accepting the deeper meaning, against assimilating the unconscious. (This very resistance to the unconscious is shewn in Silberer's use of the word 'ephemeral' in the passage just quoted, for if there is any truth at all in psychoanalysis, or, indeed, in any genetic psychology, then the primordial complexes displayed in symbolism must be the permanent sources of mental life and the very reverse of mere figures of speech.) Some patients become exceedingly adept at this method of protecting themselves from realisation of their unconscious; when they interpret their dreams, every boat-race becomes the ambition to succeed on the river of life, the money they spill on the floor is a 'symbol' of wealth, the revolvers that are fired in front of women and behind men are 'symbols' of power, and, finally, even openly erotic dreams are desexualised into poetic allegories.<sup>1</sup> If, now, the psychoanalyst allows himself to be deceived by these defensive interpretations, and refrains from overcoming the patient's resistances

<sup>1</sup> See in this connection Jung, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

he will assuredly never reach a knowledge of his unconscious, still less will he be in a position to appraise the relative importance of unconscious trends and those of the surface. By this I do not in any sense mean that the latter are to be neglected, or in their turn under-estimated, but simply that one should not put the cart before the horse and talk of something secondary and less important being *symbolised* by something primary and more important.

Throughout his later work Silberer implies that the process just discussed, of material symbolism changing into functional, occurs not merely during the course of a psycho-analysis, but spontaneously as part of the development both of the individual and of the race. What I should call a *levelling* of this sort does, it is true, go on, but the all-important point is that it does so only in the more conscious layers of the mind, so that to describe the process of symbolism in terms of it represents only a very partial truth. The order of events is rather as follows: The ideas or mental attitudes unconsciously represented in true symbols yield, of course, as the result of repression, a great many other manifestations besides symbolism. These may be either positive in kind, as the result of sublimation and other modifications, or negative, such as reaction-formations. They, like symbols, are conscious substitutes for, and products of, unconscious mental processes. From this consideration it is intelligible that many of these other conscious products stand in an associative connection with various symbols, both being derived from the same sources. But the connection is collateral, not lineal; to speak of one conscious idea symbolising another one, as the post-psycho-analytical school does, is very much like talking of a person inheriting ancestral traits from his cousin. It is true that a given symbol can be used to represent or indicate (for reasons of convenience, vividness, etc.) a collateral mental attitude derived from the same source; this is, in fact, the chief way in which secondary, metaphorical meanings get attached to symbols. But just in so far as this takes place, the further removed is the process from symbolism. It is very common indeed to find a combination in this respect, so that the figure in question is partly symbolical—*i.e.*, it represents unconscious mental attitudes and ideas—and partly metaphorical—*i.e.*, it indicates other collateral ideas. In some cases the symbolical meaning may be entirely absent, which is what I imply by the word 'levelling'; what Silberer, however,



calls the passing of material symbolism over into functional I should prefer to describe as the replacement of symbolism by metaphor—*i.e.*, by an associative connective between collaterals—and the difference is a great deal more than one of words. Further, far more often than might be imagined the symbolical meaning is present at the same time as the metaphorical, though from the nature of things it is much more likely to be overlooked or discounted than the latter. This is very striking in the case of everyday superstitions, where, in addition to the current secondary interpretations, or even when no conscious interpretation is offered, the unconscious symbolism that constitutes the basis of so many superstitions can be shewn to be actively operative in an astonishing number of those addicted to the superstition in question.

These last considerations may now be summarised in more general terms. To begin with, a concrete idea is symbolised by being represented by another concrete idea that usually has a double relationship to it—(1) an objective one, in that the object or process possesses material attributes similar to those possessed by the idea symbolised; and (2) a subjective one, in that the mental attitude towards it is, in some respects, similar to that towards the primary idea. The symbol later becomes secondarily connected, in an associative manner, with other mental attitudes derived from the same source, and is often used to indicate them. With increasing mental development these tend to become more and more general and abstract, for, as the very word implies, all abstract ideas are abstractions of concrete ones, and therefore always ultimately derived from these; so that finally we see a concrete idea, originally used to symbolise a repressed concrete idea, now used to express an abstract thought (either solely for this or, more often, for this in addition to its other function). Hence the common but mistaken view<sup>1</sup> that it is characteristic of symbolism in general to represent the abstract in terms of the concrete. Silberer, by first extending the term 'functional symbolism' from its original sense to cover the concrete representation of affective processes in general, and by then confining it to the cases where these are secondary in nature, recedes from the conception of true symbolism and reaches once more the popular conception of symbolism as the presentation of the abstract in terms of the concrete.

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 662.

It is now time to illustrate these points by actual examples, and we may begin by the one last mentioned, that of the serpent. This is one of the most constant symbols of the phallus,<sup>1</sup> and from experiences and thoughts in connection with this object the general conception of 'sexuality' is largely derived. According to the Jung-Silberer school, the image of a serpent in a dream<sup>2</sup> will symbolise the abstract idea of sexuality more often than the concrete idea of the phallus, whereas to the psycho-analytical school it only *symbolises* the latter, though of course it is commonly *associated with* the former; the practical difference this makes is that, according to the latter school, any meaning of the dream context which is expressed in terms of the general idea is secondary to, derived from, and dependent on a deeper meaning in the unconscious which can only be expressed in terms of the concrete. Again, the unconscious assimilates the general idea of knowledge in terms of the more specific idea of sexual knowledge, which in its turn is assimilated as sexual power; the association is indicated in the Biblical phrase 'to know a woman.' For this reason the idea of the serpent has become associated, especially in the East, with that of knowledge, so that it commonly serves as an emblem of wisdom (as do so many other sexual symbols—*e.g.*, salt). But to say that a serpent may 'symbolise' *either* a phallus *or* wisdom is to confound two entirely different psychological processes. The relation between them might be further illustrated by comparing these two situations—(1) the case of a man who casually makes use of the colloquial expression 'he is a wily old snake'; here it may well be that the metaphor is purely external, being based on his having heard or read that there is some supposed association between snake and cunning; (2) that of a man who personally and instinctively *feels* that the snake is a fit, natural, and intelligible emblem for the ideas of wisdom and cunning; here one would certainly expect to find that the idea is acting as a true, unconscious, phallic symbol.

A wedding-ring is an emblem of marriage, but it is not a symbol of it. When a man woos a woman he instinctively makes her a present of objects, such as bracelets, brooches, and

<sup>1</sup> Very occasionally it can also symbolise the intestines or their contents, but, so far as I know, nothing else.

<sup>2</sup> I am speaking of cases where the dream image is a symbolic one, which, of course, it need not be.

later an engagement-ring, that have the attribute of holding what is passed through them, and unconsciously are symbols of the female organ. At marriage he gives her one of the most perfect symbols of this kind, a plain gold ring, in return for the complete surrender to him of the object it symbolises. The ceremony connotes a group of abstract ideas, fidelity, continuity, etc., with which the ring is now brought into association, and for which it can then serve as an emblem, though never as a symbol.

Most charms, talismans, and amulets, are genital symbols, predominantly male. Just as they now bring good luck, or ward off bad luck, so in earlier ages they guarded against the evil powers of magical influences. That these apotropaic qualities were almost exclusively ascribed to genital symbols is due to two circumstances; first, the exaggerated association in the primitive mind between the genital organs and the idea of power or potency; and secondly, the fact that originally nearly all evil magical influences were imagined to be directed against the sexual organs and their functions. As I have shewn elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> for example, practically all the dreaded evil actions of witches in the Middle Ages were symbolic representations of the 'ligature'—*i.e.*, of the attempt to injure sexual potency; they were, in short, castration symbols. The surest safeguard against this calamity was the demonstration, by display, that the threatened part was safe; the mechanism is similar to that of the talion.<sup>2</sup> This train of thought naturally led to charms being associated with the idea of safety in general, particularly as a protection against death or mutilation, as is pathetically shewn on a large scale in the present war. Anxious relatives who press a horseshoe or a 'fums up' on their man when he leaves for the front have not the faintest idea of the meaning of their superstitious act, but that this meaning is not simply an historical one can often be shewn by analysis of their dreams, where the true symbolism becomes apparent; the unconscious often knows what the person is doing so much better than the conscious mind.

To take another current, and more important, analogy. Modern economists know that the idea of wealth means simply 'a lien on future labour,' and that any counters on earth could be used as a convenient emblem for it just as well as a 'gold

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Jones, 'Der Alptraum in seiner Beziehung zu gewissen Formen des mittelalterlichen Aberglaubens,' 1912, S. 106-110.

<sup>2</sup> It is, in part, identical with that of the perversion called exhibitionism.

standard.' Metal coins, however, and most of all gold, are unconscious symbols for excrement, the material from which most of our sense of possession, in infantile times, was derived. The ideas of possession and wealth, therefore, obstinately adhere to the idea of 'money' and gold for definite psychological reasons, and people simply will not give up the 'economist's fallacy' of confounding money with wealth. This superstitious attitude will cost England in particular many sacrifices after the war, when efforts will probably be made at all costs to reintroduce a gold currency.

We incidentally referred above to the association between the phallus and the idea of power. This is especially close in the case of that of the father, for whom, as was explained above, the idea of the king is an unconscious symbol. His special symbol, the sceptre, thus comes to be the emblem of regal authority—*i.e.*, for the pious respect due to the father. This mental attitude originates, at least in its extreme forms, largely as a reaction against the more primitive and instinctive jealousy and hatred of the father, part of the famous Œdipus-complex.<sup>2</sup> This primitive attitude is expressed in the unconscious of practically all men as the desire to kill, or at least to castrate, the father, a desire that doubtless was literally gratified in primæval times.<sup>3</sup> The mind now recoils from such a horrific conception, and in connection with it we have two beautiful examples of how it deals with this type of truth by diluting its meaning, by changing material symbolism into the harmless functional kind. According to the Jung-Silberer school, the unconscious wish to kill the father merely 'symbolises' such tendencies as the desire to overcome the old Adam in us, to conquer the part of us that we have inherited from the father, or, even more generally, to overcome a previous point of view. As might have been expected, the same ideas of father-murder or father-castration frequently occur in mythology and the older religions—if not in all religions—and mythologists have similarly deprived them of any literal meaning by interpreting them as harmless and interesting representations of such natural phenomena as the phases of the sun and moon, vegetative or seasonal changes, and so on.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XL.

<sup>2</sup> For an exposition of this see Freud, 'Traumdeutung,' 1914, S. 192-201; Rank, 'Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Saga,' 1912; Ernest Jones, 'The Œdipus-Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery,' *Amer. Journ. of Psychology*, vol. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> See Darwin, 'The Descent of Man,' 1871, ch. xx.

Freud<sup>1</sup> has shewn what an essential part this murder impulse has played in the development of religion, not only in primitive systems such as the totemistic, but also in the higher forms, and it is probable that the phallic worship which takes such a central place in earlier religions—and is far from absent in those of our own time—is derived, not only from the extraordinary over-estimation (from our point of view) of the importance of sexual functions characteristic of the primitive mind, but also as a reaction against the hostility toward the patriarchal phallus, and therefore also the divine one; in consciousness adoration for the patriarchal phallus becomes over-emphasised just because in the repressed unconscious there is the contrary attitude of hostility. Phallic worship, therefore, was determined by more than one cause, but it was fundamentally concerned with a real phallus. When the facts of Eastern phallic religions began to reach Europe in the nineteenth century, they seemed so incredible that they had at all costs to be re-interpreted into harmless terms, and the view, still prevalent, was adopted that the worship had nothing to do with the phallus as such, but was really directed towards the abstract idea of the divine creative power, which we personify as the Creator, and for which the phallus was a 'symbol' appropriate to simple minds. Reflection shews that the abstract idea in question must itself have been derived from the concrete idea symbolised by the phallic image, so that we have here one more instance of confusion between descendance and collateralism; according to the view just mentioned, the order of development was first concrete phallus, then abstract idea of generation (in so far as it would be admitted that this idea came from the former), then symbol of the abstract idea, whereas to the psychoanalyst the abstract idea and the symbol are related to each other, not as cause and effect, but only as proceeding from a common cause. Indeed, from the standpoint of scientific thought, the abstract idea that is here supposed to be symbolised is altogether illusory; we have no experience, in either the physical or spiritual world, of creation, for what masquerades as such always proves on closer inspection to be only transformation.<sup>2</sup> Yet, so hard is it for the human mind to rid itself of such fundamental illusions that the necessity of postulating a

<sup>1</sup> Freud, 'Totem und Tabu,' 1913.

<sup>2</sup> The whole question is pithily condensed in the expression, 'The wish is *Father* to the thought.'

creative force is one of the chief arguments adduced in favour of a belief in theism, and even relatively sceptical thinkers like Herbert Spencer feel obliged to fall back on the conception of a 'First Cause.'

We have so far considered the symbol in its relation to the idea unconsciously symbolised, and have reached the conclusion that in the psycho-analytical sense the symbol is a substitute for the primary idea, compulsorily formed as a compromise between the tendency of the unconscious complex and the inhibiting factors, whereas the functional interpretation is mainly concerned with the more conscious reactions to and sublimations of the unconscious complex. We have next to deal with another aspect of the problem—namely, the relation of the symbol to the idea it immediately expresses; *e.g.*, no longer with the relation of the serpent symbol to the phallus, but with that of the serpent symbol to the serpent itself. We have, in other words, to consider symbolism in terms of the reality-principle, instead of, as before, in terms of the pleasure-principle.

In dreams, myths, and similar material, we find the image of the sun used to symbolise the eye, the father, or the phallus. What bearing has this symbolism on man's conscious thoughts concerning the sun in other respects? The problem divides itself into two—namely, the question of more or less scientific knowledge concerning the sun, dictated to some extent by man's primary instinct for knowledge, and, secondly, the more practical aspects of how to deal in daily life with the external phenomena in question (heat, shade, darkness, etc.). It is only in civilised man that this distinction holds, and even there only in part, for it is everywhere hard to separate the mere curiosity for knowledge from the practical aspects of the necessity for, or desirability of, knowing. I feel sure that a great deal of what is attributed to man's pure desire for knowledge—the discoveries he makes, and so on—is really dictated much more by the impulses set up by necessity, which may be either external or internal; how well the old adage 'necessity is the mother of invention' is being illustrated at the present day!

Our problem is especially manifest in regard to what Wundt terms the 'mythological stage of knowledge.' This does not here involve the problem of mythology as a whole, which has more to do in general with the material *versus* functional controversy dealt with above, as Silberer<sup>1</sup> has well illustrated

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* ii., S. 573-586.

in a number of familiar examples. As he has also well expounded,<sup>1</sup> a most important point to bear in mind in regard to the mythological stage of knowledge is that it is a relative concept. No knowledge is recognised to be mythological by the person who believes in it—at least, not at the moment he does so believe. This, however, is also true of symbolism. It is only when we disbelieve in their objective and literal reality that we recognise them to be symbols, though even then we usually have no idea of what they had been symbolising. So a mythological piece of knowledge is at the time it is accepted, and for those who accept it, the only form of truth then possible; it is an adequate form of reality for a certain level of development. A 'higher' or more objective form of truth would be rejected, for either intellectual or affective reasons, and 'not understood.' Silberer<sup>2</sup> thinks that, on the whole, the first type of symbolism, the material phenomenon, predominates in this process. Taking the idea of symbolism in its strict sense, there is no doubt that, as both Silberer<sup>3</sup> and Rank and Sachs<sup>4</sup> point out, its occurrence in this connection serves the function of rendering it easier to assimilate the perceived material that is being dealt with; the mind assimilates it in terms of the previously familiar. What really happens is that the unconscious assimilates the new material in terms of its own thoughts, the process discussed in Section III. of this paper, the result of which will be the appearance in consciousness of a symbol of the unconscious thought.

So far all is clear, but the point that is disputed in this connection is whether the symbol can bear any relation, and if so what, to the idea (the 'higher form of truth') that will later, in either the same individual or another, replace the symbol and this mythological stage of knowledge. Can the later, more objective form of knowledge be already implicit in the earlier symbolical presentation of the attempt to deal with the problem? Silberer does not definitely answer this question, but Jung<sup>5</sup> would unhesitatingly answer it in the affirmative, and, I gather, in all cases.

To my way of thinking, the matter is more complex than would appear from this statement of it. There is certainly some connection in most cases between the symbol and the

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* ii., S. 606, 607; iii., S. 662-666.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 689.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, *Jahrb.* iii., S. 692.

<sup>4</sup> Rank and Sachs, *op. cit.*, S. 17.

<sup>5</sup> See especially Jung, *op. cit.*, ch. xv.

'future idea,' but in my opinion it is very much the same as, though not quite identical with, the connection discussed above between the symbol and the functional interpretation. I do not think that the future idea is implicit in the symbol; on the contrary, the existence of the symbol—to be more accurate, the symbolic use of the symbol—is often the very thing that is preventing the idea from being formulated. As has been explained above, the mind always tends to assimilate a new percept in terms of some unconscious complex, and every step in progress in the line of the reality-principle connotes, not only a use of this primordial association, but also a partial renunciation of it; a surrendering of the personal, subjective factor and an attending, which might almost be called sensorial, to the objective attributes of the new percept. Let us follow the example chosen above of the sun. One of the earliest conceptions of this was that it was a mighty eye, the resemblances—in connection with light, etc.—being fairly evident. Later it was regarded as a movable lamp, and later still as a hot gaseous body around which the earth revolves. If in one of these later stages of knowledge the image of the sun appeared in a dream as a substitute for that of an eye, we should, of course, call it a symbol, but in the first stage the ophthalmic idea of the sun would most accurately be described as a symbolic equivalent. Now, how did the progress in knowledge take place, and what is the relation of the symbol to the future idea of the sun? The first stage is simple enough. It is nothing but an identification of the new percept with an old one, a temporarily successful assimilation of it in terms of the older and more familiar one. I imagine that every fresh attribute observed about the sun and its behaviour, every fresh thought about it, was in turn dictated by a similar association, usually unconscious, with some previously familiar idea; or, put in another way, that attention was seriously directed to each fresh attribute through the interest already residing in the previously familiar idea with which the new attribute got associated on the ground of however faint a resemblance, for it is truly astounding how the human mind can escape paying attention to evident, and even important, observations in which it is *not* interested. But, and this is the all-important point, in this second stage the assimilation does not lead to pure symbolism; it is enough to direct attention, and give interest, to the fresh observation, but this is interpreted by a process of ratiocination in conjunction with



the facts of external reality, no longer solely in terms of the pre-existing idea, as in the first, more symbolical stage of knowledge. In so far as it is no longer thus interpreted in the older fashion, there is involved a corresponding renunciation, in favour of the reality-principle and its advantages, of the pleasure yielded by the easier and more primitive process of complete assimilation. According to the findings of psycho-analysis, *all* mental progress is accompanied with partial renunciation of some primitive form of pleasure—which is probably the reason why it is so slow—and the process just indicated is no exception to the rule.

The following example also illustrates the same point. Lightning, like mistletoe, was at first, and for thousands of years, imagined to be divine soma<sup>1</sup>—*i.e.*, semen—a notion the last form of which was the conception of a special magnetic or electric fluid; it is interesting, by the way, that the same conception—here termed magnetic fluid, vital fluid, mesmeric fluid, etc.—was long held as the theory of what used to be called 'animal magnetism'—*i.e.*, hypnotism. Increased knowledge as to the nature of lightning essentially connoted, among other things, the partial surrendering of this unconscious assimilation, the giving up of the symbol magnetic fluid, though in the unconscious symbolism that is the basis of neurotic symptoms—*e.g.*, brontophobia—the ancient association between lightning and semen recurs, and it is to be noted that we still popularly conceive of electricity as the flow of a current. Our general question, therefore, of whether the future conception is already implicit in a latent state in the symbol can be answered affirmatively only in a very restricted sense—namely, that part, and often only a small part, of the mental material that will later be converted into the more developed conception is already present, but that the idea as such is certainly not present, even in the unconscious, so that obviously it cannot be 'symbolised.'

Similar remarks hold good in the case of more complex stages in the advance of knowledge, such as scientific generalisations, as also with other conscious tendencies and interests. From one point of view these may be regarded as sublimations from unconscious complexes, developments which are, of course, greatly modified by contact with external reality and by conscious elaboration. They, like symbols, come about as the

<sup>1</sup> See Kuhn, 'Die Herabkunft des Feuers,' 1859; and the comments on it in Abraham's 'Traum und Mythos,' 1909.

result of the conflict between unconscious impulses and the inhibiting forces of repression, but they differ from symbols in that, whereas with the latter the full significance of the original complex is retained unaltered and merely transferred on to a secondary idea (that of the symbol), with the former the psychical energy alone, not the significance, is derived from the unconscious complexes and is transferred on to another set of ideas that have their own independent significance. It is true that here also regression may lead to true symbolism, where the ideas resulting from sublimation may temporarily lose their own intrinsic meaning and sink back to become mere symbols of the complexes from which their energy was largely derived. But in this case they are symbols in the strict sense and do not symbolise the sublimations, in spite of their indirect association with these. A typical example of the whole process would be the one discussed above in connection with Sperber's views, the case of agricultural work. At first these were identified with sexual acts and later achieved an independence of their own, but in neither of these stages could they be called sexual symbols, for they were not being used as pure substitutes; they become symbols only when, as in dreams, myths, etc., they for a time lose their actual meaning (wholly or in part), and are then used as substitutes for the ideas with which they were originally identified.

We have now considered three aspects of symbolism: its relation to the unconscious complex (Sections II. and III.), to the other derivatives of this (functional symbolism), and to external reality. We have last of all to consider briefly a fourth aspect, that to which Silberer has given the name 'anagogic,'<sup>1</sup> and which is very similar indeed to Adler's 'programmatic' and Jung's 'prospective' meaning of symbolism.<sup>2</sup> The last two terms are wider ones, and include the 'development of the future idea' conception just discussed, as well as the anagogic one; we are here concerned, therefore, only with the latter one.

By the anagogic signification of symbolism is meant the mystical, hermetic, or religious doctrine that is supposed to be contained in the symbol. The symbol is taken to be the expression of a striving for a high ethical ideal, one which fails to reach this ideal and halts at the symbol instead; the

<sup>1</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, 'Probleme,' etc., S. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, S. 193, 207.

ultimate ideal, however, is supposed to be implicit in the symbol and to be symbolised by it. Along this path the post-psycho-analytical school<sup>1</sup> loses itself in a perfect maze of mysticism, occultism, and theosophy, into which I do not propose to penetrate; Silberer implicitly, and Jung explicitly, abandon the methods and canons of science, particularly the conceptions of causality and determinism, so that I may consider myself absolved from the task of attempting to unravel the assumption that have culminated in their latest views. As the philosophers would say, it is impossible for us to adhere to one universe of discourse.

It is clear that the anagogic aspect of symbolism is only a special case of the general 'future idea' conception discussed above, and that the relation between the symbol and the ethical ideals in question is much the same as that already explained as subsisting between it and the various functional aspects, particularly those referring to sublimated interests and activities. In fact, the only difference that Silberer<sup>2</sup> discerns between the anagogic and functional aspects is that the former refer to future mental attitudes and the latter to present ones; when the anagogic ideal has been attained it passes into functional symbolism,<sup>3</sup> a conclusion that confirms my previously expressed suspicion as to the reactionary tendency of his general conception of functional symbolism.

## V. REVIEW OF CONCLUSIONS.

The main thesis of this paper is that it is possible usefully to distinguish, under the name of symbolism, one fundamental type of indirect representation from other more or less closely allied ones, and that consideration of the points of distinction throws a light upon the nature of indirect figurative representation in general and of symbolism in particular.

Using first the term 'symbolism' in its older broad sense (to include metaphors, etc.), we can make the following generalisations: All symbolism betokens a relative incapacity for either apprehension or presentation,<sup>4</sup> primarily the former; this may

<sup>1</sup> See especially Jung, *op. cit.*, and 'The Principles of the Unconscious,' 1916; Silberer, *op. cit.*, 'Probleme,' etc.

<sup>2</sup> Silberer, *op. cit.*, 'Probleme,' etc., S. 155.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, S. 194.

<sup>4</sup> This generalisation is about equivalent to that implied in Silberer's term 'apperceptive insufficiency,' but he tends to regard this incapacity as the essential cause of symbolism, while I regard it merely as an indispensable condition; I also lay much more stress on the affective causes of it than he does.

be either affective or intellectual in origin, the first of these two factors being by far the more important. As a result of this relative incapacity, the mind reverts to a simpler type of mental process, and the greater the incapacity the more primitive is the type of mental process reverted to. Hence, in the most typical forms the symbol is of the kind of mental process that costs least effort—*i.e.*, is sensorial, usually visual; visual because in retrospect most perceptual memories become converted into visual forms (most memories of childhood, etc.), this in turn being partly due to the special ease of visual representation. For the same reason symbolism is always concrete, because, as will be explained in a moment, concrete mental processes are both easier and more primitive than any other. Most forms of symbolism, therefore, may be described as the automatic substituting of a concrete idea, characteristically in the form of its sensorial image, for another idea which is more or less difficult of access, which may be hidden or even quite unconscious, and which has one or more attributes in common with the symbolising idea.

The essential difficulty that goes with all forms of symbolism is in the adequate apprehending (and therefore also in the conveying) of feeling. This is doubtless to be ascribed to the innumerable inhibitions of feeling which psycho-analysis has shewn to be operative throughout the mind, and which naturally exhibit a more concentrated force in some regions than in others; it is therefore to be expected that the most typical and highly developed forms of symbolism will be found in connection with those regions. Even the weakest form of symbolism, however—for instance, the metaphor—comes into this category. For example, Keats wishes to convey his exaltation at the sense of discovery experienced on first looking into Chapman's 'Homer.' He finds it impossible to do this directly, for any mere direct statement of the fact would leave us cold. He succeeds in transmitting to us some of his own thrill only by likening his sensations to those of some one who has just discovered a new planet or a new ocean.<sup>1</sup> The simile used by Keats strictly stands for an adjective—wonderful, inspiring, or what not—preceding the word 'exaltation'; and the like is true of all similes and metaphors. The problem thus arises: In what way is the replacement of an adjective by a concrete likeness related to the question of inhibited feeling?

<sup>1</sup> Here, as is often the case, the inhibition of imaginative feeling that has to be overcome is in the hearer.

The basal feature in all forms of symbolism is identification. This is one of the most fundamental tendencies of the mind, and is much more pronounced in its more primitive regions. The lack of discrimination connoted by it is only in a very slight degree conditioned by imperfect intellectual development, for the tendency to identify is mainly due to the following two factors, which relate to the pleasure-principle and the reality-principle respectively. In the first place, it is easier, and therefore pleasanter, to note the features of a new idea that resemble those of an older and more familiar one. Further, the mind tends to notice especially those features that interest it because of their resemblance to previous experiences of interest. In the second place, the appreciation of resemblances facilitates the assimilation of new experiences by referring the unknown to the already known. Even this factor, and obviously the first one, is much more an affective than an intellectual one. These identifications profoundly influence the course of further mental development along both affective lines (sublimations) and intellectual ones (increased knowledge, science).

In so far as a secondary idea B receives its meaning from a primary idea A, with which it has been identified, it functions as what may be called a symbolic equivalent of A. At this stage, however, it does not yet constitute a symbol of A, not until it replaces A as a substitute in a context where A would logically appear. There is an overflow of feeling and interest from A to B, one which gives B much of its meaning, so that under appropriate conditions it is possible for B to represent A. According to the view here maintained, the essential element of these conditions is an affective inhibition relating to A. This holds good for all varieties of symbolism, in its broadest sense.

Affective inhibition can, of course, be of the most varying degree, and on this variation greatly depends the multiplicity of the processes that are grouped under the name of 'symbolism.' When the inhibition is at its maximum there arises symbolism in its most typical form. The distinctions between this and other forms of indirect pictorial representation are qualitative as well as quantitative, and they are so important that it is here proposed that the term 'symbolism' be reserved for them solely.<sup>1</sup> It is already explicitly used in this sense by psycho-

<sup>1</sup> Mr. J. C. Flugel has suggested to me that, as an alternative to my proposal, the term 'cryptophor' be used as a counterpart of 'metaphor,' so that one might

analysts, and implicitly by many anthropologists and mythologists, and it seems worth an effort to try to get it generally accepted thus. The two cardinal characteristics of symbolism in this strict sense are (1) that the process is completely unconscious, the word being used in Freud's sense of 'incapable of consciousness,' not as a synonym for subconscious; and (2) that the affect investing the symbolised idea has not, in so far as the symbolism is concerned, proved capable of that modification in quality denoted by the term 'sublimation.' In both these respects symbolism differs from all other forms of indirect representation.

The typical attributes of *true symbolism*, as modified from the description given by Rank and Sachs, are—(1) Representation of unconscious material; (2) constant meaning, or very limited scope for variation in meaning; (3) non-dependence on individual factors only; (4) evolutionary basis, as regards both the individual and the race; (5) linguistic connections between the symbol and the idea symbolised; (6) phylogenetic parallels with the symbolism as found in the individual exist in myths, cults, religions, etc. The number of ideas that can be symbolised is remarkably small in comparison with the endless number of symbols. They are fewer than a hundred, and they all relate to the physical self, members of the immediate family, or the phenomena of birth, love, and death. They typically, and perhaps always, arise as the result of regression from a higher level of meaning to a more primitive one; the actual and 'real' meaning of an idea is temporarily lost, and it is used to represent and carry the meaning of a more primitive idea with which it was once symbolically equivalent. When the meaning of the symbol is disclosed the conscious attitude is characteristically one of surprise, incredulity, and often repugnancy.

Progress beyond the early stage of symbolic equivalency takes place (a) intellectually, by the transference of the symbolic meaning to the idea B becoming subordinated to the acquirement of a 'real,' objective meaning intrinsic in B; (b) affectively, by a refinement and modification of the affects investing A

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speak of cryptophoric as contrasted with metaphoric symbolism, instead of, as I propose, speaking of symbolism as contrasted with metaphoric representation. The objection I see to his suggestion is that, if the same word symbolism be still used generically for the two classes (for the qualifying adjective would often be omitted in practice), the current confusion between them would only be perpetuated.

(sublimation), which permits of their becoming attached to non-inhibited, conscious, and socially useful or acceptable ideas and interests. Both of these processes connote a partial renunciation as regards the original complex A, with, however, a compensatory replacement of it by other ideas and interests. Whenever there is a failure in this process of sublimation there is a tendency to regress towards the primary complex A, or, rather, this complex, being no longer indirectly relieved, once more tends to reassert itself. Inhibiting forces prevent its doing so in its original form, and as a result of this intrapsychical conflict it may express itself by means of one of its original symbolical equivalents—*e.g.*, B—which then carries, in a substitutive manner, the significance of A and is its symbol. Once this has occurred, further progress can only take place by the same process as that just described, a loosening of the ideational links between A and B, and a renunciation of the need of the complex A for direct gratification. Progress, therefore, in contradistinction to the views held by the post-psycho-analytical school, does not take place *via* symbolism, but *via* the symbolic equivalents that are the basis of this; symbolism itself, in fact, constitutes a barrier to progress. This is best seen in the blind alley of neurotic symptomatology.

The most important member of this school, from the point of view of symbolism, is Silberer, whose views have therefore been dealt with at some length in this paper. The differences between his conclusions and my own may shortly be expressed as follows: We are concerned with three groups of psychical material: (1) the unconscious complexes, (2) the inhibiting influences (Freud's ethical censor) that keep these in a state of repression, and (3) the sublimated tendencies derived from the unconscious complexes. In my judgement, the relation of symbolism to these three groups is this: Like the third group, symbols are the product of intrapsychical conflict between the first two groups. The material of the symbol is taken from the third group. The second group, which prevents the first one from coming to direct expression, is to some extent represented in the formation of the symbol; but the dynamic force that creates the symbol, the meaning carried by the symbol, and the reason for the very existence of the symbol, are all derived from the first group, from the unconscious complexes.

The fundamental fallacy of Silberer's work, as it seems to me, is that he tends to confound the process of symbolic equiva-

lency with that of symbolism itself,<sup>1</sup> as was indicated above in regard to the relation between symbolism and mental progress. As a result of this he brings symbolism into a forced relationship with the other product of the unconscious, the third group just mentioned, and tends to regard the symbol as the representative of this further product instead of its being the representative of the first, primary group. Further, on the basis of the (subordinate) part played by the second group in the formation of symbols, and the fact that it is to some extent represented in the symbol, he attaches an altogether exaggerated importance to this second group as constituting the meaning of the symbol, and especially to those aspects of the second group (the ethical ones) that are akin to the third group. To put the matter still more concisely: according to the conclusions here reached, the material of a symbol is derived from the third group while its meaning is derived essentially from the first group, to only a very limited extent from the second, and not at all from the third; according to Silberer, the meaning of a symbol is derived mainly from the second and third groups, and only to a very limited extent from the first.

I agree, however, that a symbolic image may be used to represent the second or third group of psychical material in question as well as the first, but in this function it is acting as a metaphor, not as a symbol, and it might then be usefully termed an emblem, token, or sign. When this is the case—*i.e.*, when a true symbol is being used metaphorically—all that the second or third group of psychical processes can do is to select for its purposes an already created symbol; it never contributes, in any important degree, to the actual creation of the symbol. Silberer, in my opinion, confounds the use of the metaphor with that of the symbol, and so mistakes the nature of the true symbol, ascribing to it attributes that properly belong to the metaphor. There are many features in common between the two processes—it would be impossible to confound them otherwise, and the object of this paper would be superfluous—and I do not for a moment wish to maintain that they are totally different in nature. But the differences between them, notably in their relation to the unconscious (together with the other features of symbolism discussed above), are also important.

<sup>1</sup> The same fallacy as that involved in Maeder's confusion of the latent and manifest contents of dreams, and with the same practical result—the attributing of ethical tendencies to a process that has only an indirect relationship with them.



There are, broadly speaking, two kinds of metaphor, with all gradations between them. With the first kind an analogy is perceived and made use of between two ideas that is true, objective, and of some value; thus, in the phrase 'to find the key to this problem' the analogy between such a situation and that of discovering how to enter a room difficult of access is of this nature. With the second kind the analogy is only supposed to subsist; it is subjective and often untrue in fact; thus, the phrase 'as wise as a serpent' is of this nature. Serpents are, in fact, not wiser than most other animals, and the false attribution of wisdom to them is secondary and due to a process of true symbolism, as has been expounded earlier in this paper. With the first kind the association is intrinsic, with the second it is extrinsic, depending, however, on an underlying identity in the source of both ideas (in so far, of course, as they are symbolic).

In a metaphor an abstract adjectival description is replaced by a more concrete simile. Experience shews this to be a more vivid and successful way of conveying the desired meaning and of evoking the appropriate feeling tone. The explanation is that the more primitive method—*i.e.*, recourse to the concrete and sensorial—stands nearer to the sources of feeling. In the evolution, in both the individual and the race, from the original concrete to the general, and from this to the abstract, there is an increasing inhibition of feeling accompanying the greater objectivity. Concrete images are, as a rule, more personal, familiar, subjectively toned, and invested with more feeling than abstract terms. The difference is most plainly seen in the fields where there is most inhibition. There is a considerable difference between damning a man's eyes and merely consigning him to perdition. By the use of suitable abstract circumlocutions, aided by foreign and less familiar technical terms, it is possible to discuss various sexual topics in any society without any difficulty, but—to take the other extreme—the use of some gross obscene word, familiar in childhood, but since discarded, will often bring about a marked uprush of unpleasant emotion.

Therefore, when it is wished to apprehend or convey a vivid impression, a strong feeling, recourse is had to the primitive method of likening the idea to an associated concrete image, because in this way some inhibition is overcome and feeling released; what is popularly called stimulating the imagination

is always really releasing the imagination from its bonds. The over-profuse use of metaphors, as that of slang—which fulfils the same psychological function—is well known to be the mark of expressional incapacity; the person belongs to what, in association work, is called the predicate type.

Theoretically and logically the simile is the first stage of the metaphor. But, for the motives expounded above in connection with the process of identification, the two sides of the equation become fused into one at the very onset, with a resulting economy in psychical effort. The savage does not say 'John is like a lion'; still less does he say 'John is as brave as a lion'; he boldly asserts that 'John is a lion.' And when we cannot find language sufficiently vivid to convey our admiration of John's courage, we revert to the primitive method of the savage and say likewise that 'John is a lion.'

One further point. The process known as the decay of a metaphor, whereby the original literal meaning of the word is lost and its figurative meaning receives an accepted and independent significance, is akin to what was described above as the renunciation of a symbolic meaning, whereby the symbolising idea becomes emancipated from its adventitious meaning and achieves a separate existence.

I will now attempt a final *summary* of these conclusions. The essential function of all forms of symbolism, using the word in the broadest and most popular sense, is to overcome the inhibition that is hindering the free expression of a given feeling-idea, the force derived from this, in its forward urge, being the effective cause of symbolism. It always constitutes a regression to a simpler mode of apprehension. If the regression proceeds only a certain distance, remaining conscious or at most preconscious, the result is metaphorical, or what Silberer calls 'functional,' symbolism. If, owing to the strength of the unconscious complex, it proceeds further—to the level of the unconscious—the result is symbolism in the strict sense. The circumstance that the same image can be employed for both of these functions should not blind us to the important differences between them. Of these the principal one is that with the metaphor the feeling to be expressed is over-sublimated, whereas with symbolism it is under-sublimated; the one relates to an effort that has attempted something beyond its strength, the other to an effort that is prevented from accomplishing what it would.